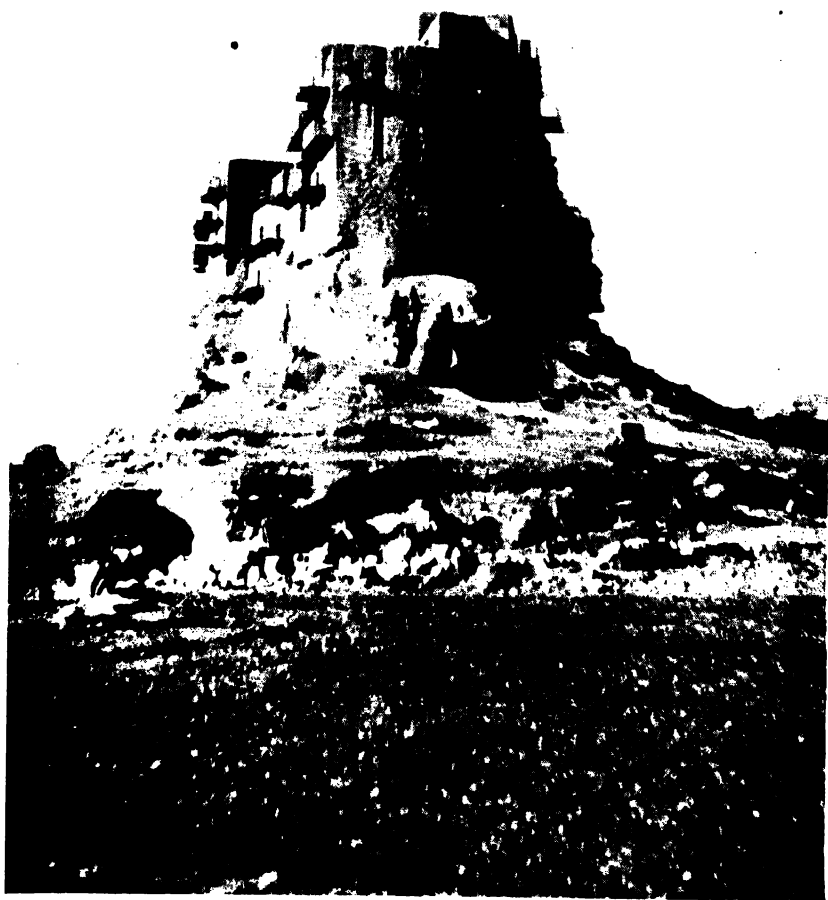


ACROSS PERSIA

For my part, I travel not to go anywhere, but to go. I travel for travel's sake. The great affair is to move ; to feel the needs and hitches of our life more nearly ; to come down off this feather-bed of civilization, and find the globe granite underfoot and strewn with cutting flints. Alas ! as we get up in life, and are more preoccupied with our affairs, even a holiday is a thing that must be worked for. To hold a pack upon a pack-saddle against a gale out of the freezing north is no high industry, but it is one that serves to occupy and compose the mind. And when the present is so exacting who can annoy himself about the future ?

R. L. STEVENSON : *Travels with a Donkey.*



THE VILLAGE OF VEZDIKHAST.

ACROSS PERSIA

BY

E. CRAWSHAY WILLIAMS

WITH ILLUSTRATIONS AND MAPS



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PREFACE

‘Look in thy heart and write.’

SIR PHILIP SIDNEY.

A MAN who loves this world of Nature and of men comes often to be possessed by a restless longing merely to study it,—to spend his time as a spectator of the great play of life ; only to live and see and learn and know and feel. And so to travel ; to become a citizen of the world, and to have the freedom of its seas and forests and sandy deserts and seething streets ; to spend life contemplating its manifold aspects and learning its countless secrets.

It is irresistibly attractive, this Travel-hunger : yet it has a somewhat selfish end, in most cases. No one save the traveller is a whit the better for a life of travel, if to travel be the only object. The artist loves his life-work, and the world is the richer for it ; the poet, the musician, the author, the politician, all these at the same time satisfy their interests and benefit mankind ; but the traveller,—with him the satisfaction of desire is barren of result except to one single individual in all this busy world. Cannot he, then, join his fellow-mortals in letting mankind find itself something the better for his pursuits ?

If he travels intelligently he certainly can, in two ways. He can apply the knowledge he has gained to the profit of his fellow-men, and he can describe his experiences for their amusement.

Surely, then, there should always be something of a sense of duty for the traveller, and in words or deeds

he should try to render payment to the world for what it gives to him ?

Such was already my philosophy when four years ago I started from India on an eight months' journey home over Persia and Russia. Since those days spent among deserts and strange people, many varied experiences have chanced to me, and other journeyings have left their mark upon the pages of my life ; but I have never forgotten the ideals with which I set out on that November morning from Bombay, and now I have come to an attempt at their further fulfilment in writing this book.

Looking back now, the perspective of things appears, perhaps, more plainly than it would have immediately after my travels were over,—it is often better to get away from an object in order to see it more clearly and truly. Nor has the lapse of time endangered the accuracy of my recollections, because at the time I was on the road I kept a very detailed journal. Often it was written under rather trying circumstances—in mud huts, in shaking railway-trains, in stuffy cabins ; but it at least was a faithful first impression of events, and as such has formed a valuable basis for a later narrative.

As to the circumstances of my voyage ; it was made in 1903, after I had resigned my commission in the Royal Field Artillery in India. Wishing to gain experience and avoid the monotony of a long and uninteresting sea-voyage, I determined to travel home by way of the Persian Gulf, Persia itself, the Caspian Sea, Russia, and then by one of the various overland Continental routes to England.

Accordingly I interviewed my Indian servants ; found two, Kishna and Kalicha by name, ready to come with me ; happened by good fortune upon an Afghan, Saifullashah, employed in the State service at

Simla, who was glad of a holiday in Persia and who spoke Persian fluently; and collected the various and somewhat numerous necessities incidental to travelling in desert Eastern lands. In addition to my suite of humans there was another important member of the party, my little Scotch terrier 'Mr. Stumps,' who has been with me since his puppyhood at Oxford.

All was at length prepared, and one late autumn day I found myself at Bombay, the personnel and paraphernalia of my expedition all present and ready to start.

Then came the journey up the Persian Gulf. This, owing to the kindness of the then Viceroy of India, Lord Curzon, and of the Resident, Colonel Kemball, was made under the pleasantest auspices, since I was able to accompany the Viceregal party then proceeding on a tour of the Gulf.

Throughout my journey, indeed, I met with the greatest kindness, and I should like here to render my deepest and most sincere thanks to all those who helped me on my travels. Especially, perhaps, are my thanks due to Lord Curzon, Colonel and Mrs. Kemball, Major and Mrs. Cox, Captain Grey, Mr. George Grahame, our Consul at Shiraz (whose hospitality to me was both delightful in itself, and enabled me to extract a profit from my stay which would otherwise have been impossible), Mr. E. G. M. Swifte (whom I met at Ispahan, and to whom I owe a similar debt of gratitude), and Sir Arthur Hardinge, then our Minister at Teheran, who, with Lady Hardinge, made my stay in the capital of Persia as pleasant as it was interesting. I should also like to write a special word of thanks to the officials of the Indo-European Telegraphs, whose genial and generous kindness I shall never forget. Let me say here that nothing has struck me more in my visits to the distant and desert places of the earth

than the noble and steadfast courage of those Englishmen who in the most difficult circumstances carry on the business of our country with a persevering loyalty to which no praise and no reward could be adequate.

The Gulf is a place of fierce heat and violent storms, of barren yellow coasts and dim pink hills, of desolation and death. The wild scenes of the pirate days have disappeared before the strong and unselfish influence of Great Britain; but, alas! even the power of our native land is not potent enough to alter the conditions of Nature, and the Gulf regions remain an inhospitable and unprofitable place for the white man.

Nearly at the head of the Gulf is the chief port thereof, Bushire, and it is upon our arrival there that my story begins.

Imagine, then, the sea-voyage over, my little collection of mortals and merchandise and my beloved Mr. Stumps all landed safely on the coast of Persia, and the curtain ready to ascend on the first scene of my travels proper.

I can only hope that what follows may be as pleasant to read as it has been to write. Again I have lived and wandered in a strange Eastern land; again I have felt the eerie fascination of the great, elemental mysteries of life and Nature met with in the Orient. The East with its fierce blaze and parching heat, its wide-stretching wastes bounded by far walls of jagged peaks where shimmers the dim sheen of untrodden snows; with its mysterious humanity, so little understood by us Western mortals,—the East with all its glamour and charm has been brought for me into this drab city, like some strange sweet dream of another and a more wonderful world.

ELIOT CRAWSHAY WILLIAMS.

LONDON,
September, 1907.

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ACROSS PERSIA

CHAPTER I

THE LAND OF THE LION AND THE SUN

‘Anchoring, round she swings;
And gathering loiterers on the land discern
Her boat descending from the latticed stern.
’Tis manned—the oars keep concert to the strand,
Till grates her keel upon the shallow sand.’

BYRON: *The Corsair*, Canto I. 4.

To most minds there is something ~~unutterably tedious~~ about being for long aboard a ship. A bad sailor, of course, finds the sea a mere place of torment; but even a good sailor, granted the best of weather and the pleasantest of companions, usually comes to hail the end of a voyage with relief. After a time the legs long to stretch themselves to some further extent than that afforded by the planks of the upper deck. There grows an uncomfortable feeling, which not even the violence of aboard-ship sports can dispel, that the body is becoming slack and inert from want of outlet for its energy; the senses weary of idle days dozed away in the lazy luxury of a deck-chair, with, as a companion, a book (which is a mere excuse, for the mind suffers the same demoralization as the body) or a human being, usually of the opposite sex, whose society is apt to become either unutterably boring or dangerously interesting.

Always there is the monotony of an ever-distant horizon, the inexorable and pendulum-like appearance and disappearance of which over the rail that hems in the tiny kingdom of the ship eventually hypnotizes the brain into a sluggish lethargy. Work of any kind becomes repugnant and almost impossible. To attempt to break through the spell of indolence brings about the peculiar feeling produced in a nightmare by trying to catch a train, while invisible forces seem to prevent, by powers which are more than human, the purpose of the will.

From this trance the end of the voyage wakes body and mind to a new life. There is a pleasant sensation of freedom and space about even the most inhospitable shore. The mere steadiness and extent of solid ground are things to be thankful for. Like Don Juan and his companions, to whom

‘Lovely seem’d any object that should sweep
Away the vast, salt, dread, eternal deep,’

the eyes welcome anything besides a flat waste of water as a joyous sight. Once on shore, the torpid limbs, feeling again the earth beneath them, are content to move merely for the sake of motion. There is a desire to go far because there is distance which can be traversed, to break bounds for sheer joy that they do not any longer exist. The very picturesqueness of the sea lying there, twinkling with that uneasiness but so lately escaped from, is appreciated the more for its remoteness.

There are no doubt some who take a sincere joy in a sea voyage, and to whom shore-going is only an interlude in a ‘life on the ocean wave’; but they do not represent the majority. The average Englishman likes the sea; but he likes it from the land. In his

mind there float snatches of Dibdin's songs and names of great Admirals and great victories, all of which make him look upon the sea as in some way his heritage, something he must be proud of. He prefers to think of the English as a nation of sailors rather than of shop-keepers. But the spirit's willingness cannot, unfortunately, prevent the flesh from being weak, and while the Englishman of the imagination is potentially a roistering seaman, the Englishman of fact would gladly subscribe for a Channel Tunnel if he were not even more averse to the discomfort of certain and prolonged soldiering than to that of possible and temporary sailing. No ; natural man is not a seafaring animal, and, there can be small doubt of it, the end of a voyage comes as a relief.

The coming to shore which begins this book was no exception to the common rule. The voyage itself had, indeed, been neither long nor uninteresting ; ~~on the~~ contrary, its length of something over a month had been rendered delightful by pleasant companionship and broken by visits ashore. It had been as comfortable and as eventful as a voyage well could be ; but it had brought me to a land of such peculiar fascination that the journey by sea could not but be looked upon as only a delightful introduction to the real subject of my travels.

Before me lay Persia, the Land of the Lion and the Sun—though now the lion exists only in the fertile imagination of the Persian, albeit the sun rages as rampantly as ever ; the land, too, of much else : of a mighty yet lamentable history, where once monarchs ruled the world, and where to-day dwell the hill shepherd and the bazaar merchant, a people of whom the incomparable Hajji Baba is the type and supreme example ; the land of Cyrus, Darius, Xerxes, Alex-

ander, of many a hero of history, of many a place of fame.

There once lived Omar — ‘Omar, the Mahometan Blackguard’ of Carlyle—Omar, the divinity, almost, of a creed to-day; there, too, Sa’adi, Hafiz, and many another poet-philosopher, who lived and sang and died among the rose-gardens and cypresses. There, to-day, lies many an old-world marvel :—ruins of palaces, great sculptured pictures on the faces of cliffs, tombs of Emperors hewn from the living rock.

To such a land I came at the end of my voyage that sunny winter morning, made familiar in my mind with what I was to see, not only by history, but by the annals of predecessors in my path. Fryer, Chardin, Le Bruyn, and many another, they have left for the amusement and, even to-day, for the guidance of the pilgrim, quaint records of their long and laborious journeyings in days when travelling was not the occupation of a holiday, but the profession of a lifetime.

History aided by the accounts of these explorers of old, and by those of more recent travellers, had peopled Persia with a multitude of interests, and as my steamer drew into Bushire, I left with a mitigated regret the pleasant associations of my days at sea.

My vagabondage had begun. I was free. For me there was no mapped-out journey; my path might lie where I willed. Time and space were at my disposal,—I was lord of both. I could go, eventually, west to Damascus, north to Samarcand or even to far Siberia, or, should I choose, I could make my way east to China. The earth was mine and the wideness thereof. But now, here, immediate, in the present, was Persia, lying there before me with all its storehouse of interest.

The true vagabond has no far-reaching plans, and it

was sufficient for me that I was my own master, with months to fill and a land to fill them.

The place at which I had arrived was nearly at the head of that great arm of water between Persia and Arabia which, in my school-days, used to confound me by getting mixed up with its next-door neighbour, the Red Sea.

My course had lain from Bombay up the Persian Gulf to Bushire, my present port of debarkation, and, on the way, there had been visits at Muscat, Bundar Abbas, Bahrein, and other Gulf ports. Zigzagging to and fro between the north-east and south-west shores of the Gulf, we had gained a very good general idea of the coast-line of both Persia and Arabia. Passing the gaunt headlands of Musandim which guard the portals of the inland sea, we had steamed alternately southwards to the low-lying Pirate Coast, and back to the narrow strip of sun-beaten sand which ~~lies to the~~ north between the sea itself and the jagged rock wall of Southern Persia. Always there had been one of these two features in the view: to the north the yellow streak of sand running back to the dim pink hills, or to the south the barren, shrub-dotted desert of Arabia.

Now at last we had definitely abandoned this latter, and had finally put in to a Persian port.

Bushire has at least two inconveniences—its climate and its harbour. The former is typical of the Gulf; that is to say, it is just tolerable in the winter and absolutely intolerable in the summer, when, as Lord Curzon remarks, ‘the ordinary thermometer bursts, and those graded high enough have placed the solar radiation at 189° Fahr.’ The second is also a type, inasmuch as, like almost all Persian harbours, it does not allow ships of any magnitude to come nearer than

a mile or so to the actual landing-place. Consequently, after a deal of transshipment, the last portion of the journey has to be made in small native craft.

A picturesque, animated scene lay before me in the bright morning sunshine as I coasted quietly by the long, rude wharf at Bushire, off which lay scores of *buggalows*, loading or unloading oil, dates, shells, and other motley merchandise of the place. Past the Belgian custom-house buildings we went, and drew in to the landing-place. A busy throng bustled to and fro over the wharf: Persian soldiers in their ballet-girl-like attire; natives in their 'handleless-saucepan' hats; ragged Arabs washing shells, unloading canvas-covered oil-jars, or more generally sitting doing nothing; women with their long black or blue gowns draped shapelessly over their heads down to their feet, looking like so many animate bales of stuff; ~~little 'strast'~~ Arabs—only they are real Arabs here—much like their fellows all over the world, with their devilments and mercurial movements in and out of the hurrying mob. Here, too, I saw the khaki-clad horsemen who form the body-guard of the British Resident—fine, smart-looking Sikhs. It was good to hear the rough words of command again as they swung off at a canter with a clink and jostle that must always send a little thrill of pleasure through one who has himself ever clattered along to that same tune.

Bushire is a place of narrow little white lanes, drab Eastern buildings with flat housetops, dusty, smelly bazaars, and—a feature which gives it no small distinction—a sea-front. A great place, this sea-front; it is Bushire's boulevard, Unter den Linden, Hyde Park, and everything else all in one; it is the fashionable promenade.

Indeed, it is a pleasant place on a bright morning

in the cool of the year. I used to stroll down before breakfast and linger outside Gulzâd's to bask a little in the sunshine and watch the tide of nature and of men.

A quaint place, Gulzâd's. Gulzâd himself is quite a character, and we will step into his shop for a moment and see him. Passing out of the morning sun, we find ourselves in a long passage-shaped room, dark, and full of the smell of groceries. Down the length of the shop sit silent, grave Persians, apparently on no business whatever, and not objected to by anyone. Behind this reception chamber is another room, full of stores, wine, cocoa, matches, tea—you can get pretty well anything at Gulzâd's. But this is not a mere shop, it is nothing so sordid; nor is Gulzâd himself a mere shopkeeper. This stubby little old Armenian is a friend, philosopher, politician;—not that, incidentally, he does not appear to make something out of life and his fellow-creatures. But he is above all a ~~man of the~~ world. The native, perhaps, he treats somewhat as an inferior, and in some degree as his lawful prey, but you are an equal, a friend; to suggest you were a mere customer would be an insult. You wish to buy a razor-strop, and point to some that hang at the back of the shop. Gulzâd shakes his head mournfully: 'No,' he says, 'I would not advise you, zey are not good.' The inference is that for the Persian they may do well enough, but with the white man Gulzâd is on different terms,—to be perfectly frank, he has nothing in that line which is good enough. But will you have a whisky-and-soda? . . .

Outside in the sunlight the tide is coming in with little grey-green ripples, chasing each other, sparkling, over the brown sands. Down along the beach are groups of native washerwomen, standing bare-footed in the little pools among the rocks or in the shallow,

glittering wavelets, and beating the weekly wash in an unmerciful manner which sends a shudder through any proprietor of clothes. It is a pretty sight, though, these graceful native women on the brown sands bending and rising over the sparkling water. Now and again a shawl will waywardly float out a few feet in the breeze, and lure its mistress into gathering up her long draperies to display a perfectly moulded leg and a tiny ankle circled by little silver rings; occasionally a black shawl will fall from a dark-haired damsel's head, to display sometimes quite a beautiful face. But usually the washerwomen are a long vista of black-shawled figures with only the shapely arms and feet of the wearer visible; these little revelations must be, of course, pure accidents. Oh, perfidy! to let an accursed foreigner catch a glimpse of the hidden and forbidden face! (Let it be whispered, however, that ~~there is some~~ reason to suppose that a strict adherence to the Oriental regulations might possibly imply that the said countenance would gain nothing by further disclosures, for her great brown eyes are generally a Persian lady's best feature.) The air is filled with a multitudinous slapping of wet clothes, with which mingle the shrill shrieks of the little half or wholly naked children who are common objects of the seashore anywhere east of Suez. Cosmopolitan little creatures, they show every variety of type from the coarse, swarthy Nubian to the delicate light brown Persian.

Of course they play games, and the games of children all the world over seem to have a singular resemblance. Tip-cat was the fashion when I was in Persia. Taking a stick, say 2 feet long by $\frac{1}{2}$ inch across, a little boy would strike a smaller stick, about 4 inches long and 1 inch in diameter, with a knack that made it jump

into the air, when it was hit as far along the sands as his strength and skill could send it. Then another little chap, standing at the place it reached, would take it and fling it with all his force at his companion's head. The hitter, seizing a couple of other striking sticks, would throw the lot at the missile, hitting it with one of the three much more often than one would imagine.

Little girls have a similar game, slightly modified to suit the feminine temperament. Instead of the small stick being hurled at the young lady's head, it is flung from its resting-place at the hitting stick, which is placed on the ground by the striker, the penalty for failing to hit apparently being for the little girl who threw to carry her opponent on her back from one spot to the other.

Altogether it is an animated scene in the cool freshness of a December morning, the twinkling waves lapping the shining sands, the groups of women bending over the water, the children, bright as the morning itself, shouting at their games ;—Bushire is not so bad.

But there is another side, the side of filthy alleys, of dust-heaps, of old withered hags, of the beggars, the sick and the deformed. At every corner there is some terrible sight ;—a man, holding up a withered stump of an arm ;—a deformed child ;—a woman whose sightless eyes peer into yours. Almost every other man and woman you meet has something amiss : a contorted face, a dead-looking open eye which glares blindly out, a sunken temple, a network of pitted scars. The East is a place of wild extremes ; and disease, uncontrolled as it at present is by science, runs riot like some luxurious tropic growth.

One day I went into the British dispensary in a Persian town. A man was sitting groaning on a chair while the assistant-surgeon bathed his eyes.

'Ophthalmia,' said the surgeon placidly. 'A bad case; he will never see again.' (Ophthalmia in some form or another is so common as to cause no comment in the East.) Two women, presumably a couple of his wives, sat by and patted his head, while he moaned.

Then up came an old hag and said something which made my friend turn to a man near by who smiled amiably and indiscriminately at everybody. 'Mad, of course,' the doctor remarked. And then, turning to the assistant: 'Give him some bromide to keep him quiet.' But he only gibbered harmlessly, and wanted the old woman to drink it; so they told her to take it and him home. There were other horrors; but they are common enough out there, and are not nice to describe.

Such it is,—the East:—a gorgeous mixture of dazzle and darkness, luxury and misery, beauty and filth, bewildering the mind alternately by its majesty and ~~its horror.~~

One thing is certain: the chief missionary effort needed throughout the Eastern parts of the world is one devoted to the spread of the religion of science;—the doctor is the greatest, the best, and the most respected of missionaries; and rightly so. He heals men's bodies, and it is their bodies that chiefly require healing at the present moment. Sanitary conditions, knowledge of remedies and of the methods of disease-prevention, a better and a more healthy way of life; these are the first steps towards the regeneration of Oriental peoples. No wonder the man who can bring comfort to their sufferings and make them better human beings is looked upon with veneration and esteem.

He deserves to be.

Amidst horrors that are indescribable and difficulties that are almost overwhelming, confronted with prejudice and superstition, and embarrassed by lack

of proper appliances, he has a life to lead which is only enviable to those who take their greatest joy in seeing the world progress, even if only in some little measure, by their efforts. Would that their numbers were more and their powers even greater! Can there, indeed, be any doubt that what is needed in the East is to first mend the body, then develop the intelligence, and lastly, if by that time there is any need after this religion of stern fact has been dealt with, to turn attention to the infinite and insoluble mysteries of theology?

As we shall now be concerned in many doings with the Persian man, it may, perhaps, be as well to give some short description to bring him before the mental eye.

Mr. Persian, then, is very much the same in appearance from the highest to the lowest in the State. In Mahometan lands the wearing of fine ~~clothing is~~ strictly forbidden. Colours, silk, in fact all ostentation, is contrary to the Koran, and the consequence is that the inhabitants present a drab monotony of greys and browns and blacks, which almost outdoes even the billycock banality of London. The general effect is not, however, quite so atrocious, saved as it is by a quaint unconventionality in shape, which does much to counterbalance the dull sameness of shade.

The typical Persian is a handsome man; there are few more good-looking races on the face of this earth. With a fine nut-brown and sometimes even lighter complexion, he has splendid eyes, well-moulded features, and a devil-may-care air which carries off his whole presence admirably. On the top of his head is stuck, among the upper classes, a black lamb's-wool structure of the shape of a decapitated cone, or a circular one, somewhat resembling a top-hat without the brim,

which is the symbol of the military man. The lower classes affect a black head-dress of smooth, stiff cloth, which may be compared in shape to an inverted handleless saucepan. From beneath this, there protrudes at the back a huge mass of brown hair, which is cut short at the neck by a clean-shaved line. This mass of hair is 2 or 3 inches long, and generally curls upwards from beneath his hat, or *kulah*. The more the hair curls, the prouder is its Persian possessor. A loose, nondescript garment falls from his shoulders, and is gathered in by some sort of a belt at the waist, which gives the wearer the appearance of having on a blouse and short skirt. Over all in the winter is thrown a huge, furry *poshteen*, while, below, the Persian is clad in loose trousers or sometimes knickerbockers and putties. In the cities, various holy men, professors and others, wear turbans instead of the national hat, ~~and these~~ turbans are a sign of their profession. In spite of their unostentatious mode of dress, the Persians are certainly a striking race in appearance.

The women, when you can see them (and a pretty girl often manages somehow or another to let you get a glimpse of her face), are sometimes quite good-looking when they are young; but, as always in the East, like hothouse flowers, they develop early and fade quickly. A girl still in her teens is in her prime; a woman of twenty-five is already 'going off,' and later in life she becomes a veritable old hag. All have beautiful eyes,—great, brown things with a beauty that seems to belong more to the animal than to the human being. (I have seen such eyes in dogs more often than in men and women.) With a certain acuteness, fashion ordains that these eyes are the only things which need be visible to the outside world, for the rest of the face is generally supposed to be kept studiously

covered up. Even these dangerous eyes are invisible in the cities, and the women go about clad from top to toe in a long blue or black gown, whose monotony is only broken in front, where hangs a long white strip of cloth, with, at the top, a little window of fine net, through which the wearer can see, but which the sight of the outside world cannot penetrate. This long white strip hangs down almost to the ground, and is fastened round the forehead over the all-enveloping dark gown. Form and fashion do not change quickly in Persia, and things have been very much the same for centuries. Fryer's description in 1676 is sufficiently accurate to-day to merit quoting: 'The Women are fair, with rather too much Ruddiness in their Cheeks; their Hair and Eyes most black; a little Burly, by reason they wear their Cloths loose, yet not altogether so, but more at ease than our Dames; a Plump Lass being in more esteem than our Slender and Straitlaced Maidens.' The worthy traveller is not always over-gallant, however, for elsewhere he remarks: 'In these Two *Munfels* we only meet with these Servitors, in other Places Men appear alone, not allowing their Women that Freedom; but were they no more tempting than these Swains, they'd have small cause for the Restriction; for they are Strapping Sunburnt lasses, with little more Cloaths on than a dark coloured Smock, or Frock; and for their Meen it is not enticing.'

As for the Persian child, it much resembles these little animals in all other countries. It is healthy and generally happy; it plays its games and wonders at the world much as would its brother or sister in England, Japan, or the Fiji Islands; it has little to do, for which it is thankful, and in a land where the national maxim is to do as little and get as much for it as possible, it has no inadequate training for its

future career. Sometimes it attends school, and then the noise it makes is appalling. Contrary to the custom in England, the child in Persia is quieter out of school than in it, for the particular occupation during school hours appears to be for every child to incessantly repeat everything it knows at the top of its voice. What it learns or how it learns it I was unable to comprehend, but no doubt it finds it sufficient in present circumstances. . . .

My stay at Bushire was not long, and now, at last, after many arrangements and argumentations, I had contracted for some mules, negotiated my goods through the customs, and having surmounted infinite impediments and delays, was ready to start on the chief part of my journey.

It was five on a December morning when I scrambled out of bed in the hospitable mansion in which I was entertained, to finally tidy up and depart. Outside, the Ramazan moon was silvering the white housetops, and the roofs of Bushire, generally a somewhat unpicturesque prospect, looked quite beautiful.

Getting off is not an easy matter in Persia. First of all, the coolies were an hour late; then, when all my things were at last transported to the wharf and put in the boat in which I was to sail across the little bay to the caravan terminus of Shief on the opposite side, the boatman stated that he wanted more than double the proper fare to take me over. This dodge the wily native frequently plays on the innocent traveller. He gets him comfortably stowed aboard, and then, presuming on his passenger's reluctance to turn out again, audaciously demands anything he pleases. For once, however, I checkmated him;—out came all my things again on to the wharf. Eventually another man offered to take me for a fare and a half, but I stood



ON THE FRONT AT BUSHIRE.

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out for a fare and a quarter as a reasonable compromise. At last the original man came round and insisted on having all my things put back, and said he would take me for what I asked.

Difficulties, however, were not at an end ; just as I was going to get off, up came a man with a bill, payment for which I had left with my host of the last few days. This I told him, but he was not satisfied, and, standing between me and the boat, threateningly proclaimed that he would not let me embark until I had actually delivered the money into his hands. I had already had trouble with this same man about the money for my coolies, and had informed him that if he gave me any more unnecessary bother I would pitch him into the water. I confess that by this time my temper was rapidly disappearing, and with this last contretemps I fear it fled altogether. I eyed the man. He was a big man. I communicated to him in the most correct Persian at my disposal that if he did not listen to reason and let me pass, I in very truth should be forced to carry out my threat in order to get into the boat. He laughed, and dared me to throw him off the wharf ; whereupon I did so. He unfortunately fell into the boat, and, leaping up, came for me. I dislike warfare, and I am a poor pugilist ; but there are times when even one who is not born to fighting has fighting thrust upon him. When a large and angry man is coming at you with all the impetus he has derived from a short run and a violent temper, the time for peaceable discussion has passed, and the only argument possible is the argument that applies immediately to the exterior of the person addressed. I met his onslaught with a fairly hard left-hander, after recoiling from which he came at me with more vigour than ever. I did not, however, wish to become

involved in a fight, so I seized his arms and held him, struggling and cursing, until, somewhat pacified, he agreed to come again to words instead of blows. Eventually I compromised by leaving the matter in the hands of a friend, and at last, to my infinite satisfaction, I found myself putting off from the wharf in the boat with, actually, my late enemy among the crew which was conveying me across the bay.

The Persian is as quick at forgetting a quarrel as he is at making one, and while I was thinking over the late incident, regretting the loss of my temper and reflecting on Schopenhauer's dictum that such an event implies the superiority of your adversary, he was apparently engaged in a somewhat similar process at the other end of the boat. Presently he bobbed down, groped underneath a thwart, and then came aft to where I was sitting. In his hand he held a small piece of battered-looking carpet, which, without a word, he presented to me to sit upon. This little act quite overcame me, and I had a desire to apologize to him, which was only prevented by the inadequacy of my knowledge of Persian to express my thoughts. Dumb show does pretty well, however, on most dramatic occasions, and we speedily and effectually made up our late little difference.

The wind sank, and we had to get out oars in order to get along at all. The dynamics of the art of rowing as practised on the Persian coast entirely bewildered me. Fastening the oar—a pole to the working end of which is attached the side of a box—to a thole-pin by a piece of rope, the oarsman sits further down the gunwale, facing the interior of the boat, and rows in towards the side. Why the boat goes forward at all I have not been able to ascertain. Theoretically, the efforts made should merely tend to lift it in the air. Somehow or another, however, the rowers do manage

to propel the boat along, and with their feet planted against bamboos running lengthways down the boat, work away industriously, aided by another man who, when he has an opportunity, endeavours to assist by 'punting' with a flimsy pole.

In this extraordinary fashion we progressed, while to vary the monotony I produced a pistol and had a few shots at various birds which occasionally drifted within range. This impressed the boatmen amazingly, but otherwise did not have any tangible result. This, however, is not necessary in Persia, where the process of doing a thing is always looked upon as more important than the effect produced.

Round a corner suddenly we came upon Shief, and, having taken about two and a quarter hours to do eight miles, my servants, my baggage, and myself found ourselves deposited by a desolate stone building on the barren sandy promontory which was to be the starting-place for our caravan.

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CHAPTER II

THE OPEN ROAD

‘Afoot and light-hearted I take to the open road,
Healthy, free, the world before me,
The long brown path before me leading wherever I choose.’
WALT WHITMAN.

THE way to Persia lay open before me; a brave, broad road, for on every side, save where, behind me, there glittered the waters of the Gulf, there stretched away the great brown desert. With a curious impression of flat immensity, it lay there beneath the beating glare, an unending monotony of sandy, sun-baked earth. Here and there it dipped into undulations which threw up sharp black shadows; a sparse shrub or two—scarcely to be dignified by the name of tree—stood out gaunt and lonely on the face of the inhospitable wilderness. But these breaks in the scheme only served to emphasize the strange sameness of the endless, desolate vista. No,—not endless; for far in the dim north, above the shimmering haze which trembled over the desert, there ran a long boundary-wall of faint shadows. Jagged, and forbidding despite the softening touch of the pink distance, they rose sharp out of the plain—the great rock wall of Persia.

Thither lay our path across the waste, and, looking out to them from the coast, I reflected that in a march or two we should be attacking their formidable line, and vaguely wondered how we should do it.

The mules should have arrived by now ; but that means nothing in Persia. In a country where the motto is 'Never do to-day what you can put off till to-morrow, and never do anything at all if it can possibly be avoided,' business habits and punctuality are accounted eccentricities, if not positive vices.

Life is too short to worry about time, says the East.

'Unborn To-morrow and dead Yesterday,
Why fret about them if To-day be sweet ?'

sings our Persian philosopher, and sings his country's sentiments.

The two favourite phrases in the land are '*Insh-allah farda*' ('To-morrow, by the grace of God'), and '*Aib n'eeest*' ('It doesn't matter'). Anyone who is so unpleasant, ill-mannered, and unphilosophical as to say that 'it does matter,'—well, he is set down at his proper value, and is made so uncomfortable that in a very short time he resignedly accepts, at all events as a *modus vivendi*, the custom of the country. It is all he can do.

It is no good for anyone to go to the East if he is in a hurry. The East is a land of waiting—he will have to wait, whether he likes it or not : he cannot single-handed overthrow a nation. Two years in India had taught me something of this, and I had begun to absorb the soul-destroying influence of Oriental indifference. So I sat on the sand beneath a little shrub and patiently waited for the mules.

It was weary work. The way lay clear and straight before me ; my heart longed for the road ; my mind told me that every hour of delay meant another hour of marching by night in a strange land—and the mules did not come.

Caravan after caravan came up out of the desert ;—

first little moving specks of black on the brown sand, then strange creatures distorted by the quivering shimmer floating over the desert into monstrous things with bodies ten feet high, or, apparently, cut clean in half and travelling on in two sections. Approaching, receding, changing, at last they resolved themselves into solid flesh of man and beast, and came wearily up with a shouting of voices and tinkling of bells to unship the burdens from their camels or mules, and make snug for the night. And still my mules did not come.

The sun swung across the heavens, the day changed from palpitating heat to drowsy cool, the dusk began to creep up from the far-off hills to the north-east—and yet there were no mules.

At length, when hope deferred had made the heart entirely sick, and, played false over so many an alien caravan, I had almost ceased to speculate on the tiny far-off strings of animals, now scarcely to be seen through the falling night, up came Saif.

‘There, sir,’ said he, ‘they come.’

I thought it prudent to doubt; but he was right, and, in a little, the faithless mules sauntered calmly in.

It was no use to be angry—it is rarely any use anywhere, and less so than usual in the East; so we did not vainly waste time, but got to work.

My little camp sprang into astonishing life and energy.

Boxes, packages, tins of every size, lay piled in a chaotic heap;—looking from the heap to the mules, and from the mules to the heap, it seemed a hopeless task to reconcile the two.

But mules were kicked towards boxes, boxes dragged to mules; by powers apparently miraculous, packages fitted themselves into the most impossible places;

shapeless edifices rose on the pack-saddles; mules became actually ready, and were let loose to browse aimlessly about on the peculiarly unbrowsable wilderness; and after much struggling and swearing and shouting we were in order in a really incredibly short space of time. Saif and I were each honoured with a pony—so let it be called for want of a better name; it certainly was not a mule, but that was almost all that could be said for it. As the pack-animals were now quite ready, we pushed enormous bits into our poor little steeds' reluctant mouths—they seemed as if they had never had a bit between their teeth before, and never wanted it again—and, after 'padding' a little with blankets, contrived to make the girths fit sufficiently tightly round their thin carcasses to make it at all events improbable that we should swing suddenly under them and be deposited on the desert.

Just as night fell we were ready to start;—Saif and I bravely mounted on our Rosinantes; the pack mules in order of march, tended by men seated on donkeys so small as to be almost invisible under the mass of blankets and man on their poor little backs; Kalicha and Kishna, with a mount between them (neither of them could ride); and, last, my Mr. Stumps, who was afoot and in great spirits, as were we all, at getting away, at length, on the first march of our journey through Persia.

At this moment there rode up two picturesque and ruffianly looking Persians. From their personal appearance, they might have been members of one of those bands of robbers of which one hears so much, but of which, in these decadent days of railway trains and Atlantic liners, one sees so little. Each was a swarthy, heavily moustached man, clothed in the loose-flowing drab garments universal in this Mahometan land, a

black *kulah* stuck on top of his bushy masses of hair, and slung over his shoulder a formidable-looking, if rather prehistoric, rifle. Delightfully savage and romantic, all this. But, alas! alas! instead of the fleet Arab steed that a robber should ride, each was mounted on—a Persian mule! Nor were they robbers;—they were policemen.

To the civilized Englishman the word ‘policemen’ conjures up visions of robust, red-faced persons, soberly but smartly clothed in dark blue cloth, and wearing an unpretentious, stern-looking helmet. These worthies are invested with a halo, almost, of unflinching integrity, and wield authority which makes the lifting of their little finger respected by the most trenchant and truculent bus-driver. The champing dray-horse and the fiery steed between the shafts of a London cab are fiercely if reluctantly pulled up to let the nursemaid and her charge find safe passage to the Broad Walk, and nothing could be more eloquent of civilization than the respect and awe for the powers of justice which results in this victory of mere authority over brute force.

Nothing, either, could be further from the Persian parallel. In the East moral authority is at a discount, and when brute force does not win it is because cunning overcomes it. But the Persian policeman gains in interest what he loses in status, and although he is not such a reliable protector, he is a good deal more fascinating study than his British brother. He is a delightful ruffian—none the less delightful because he is a ruffian, and none the less a ruffian because he is a licensed ruffian. In fact, his being licensed adds to his attraction, because his ruffianly characteristics need not then be so seasoned with the petty fear of consequences, which makes the unlicensed ruffian gain his

ends by mean and underhand methods, which both inspire the traveller's distaste and often altogether escape his detection. It is thus both an easier and a pleasanter task to deal with the fairly flaunting delinquencies of that class of man who in his escapades can, by virtue of his position, reckon on comparative immunity.

Our friend the Persian policeman, known in that land as the *tufangchi*, will guard you excellently when it is to his interest to do so; he will steal from you when he thinks it will be more profitable; and, if possible, he will do both at once, and thus obtain a twofold reward for his services. His dexterity, both mental and bodily, is enormous. He is usually, even for Persia, beyond the ordinary expert in resource and ingenuity in both words and deeds. In a land where lying is considered an accomplishment rather than a fault, and the only crime is to be found out, he is renowned for an uncommon proficiency in the national art. He will tell you that there are robbers about, when the only robbers within a hundred miles are himself and his companions. Having thereby planted himself upon you, he will accompany you until you have either paid him or he has paid himself, when he will assert that the extent of his 'beat' is now ended, and will depart to his home or to some other prey. To the merchants' caravan he acts impartially as protector, plunderer, and pleasant companion. The system of the country is prey and be preyed on. He is preyed on, and he takes good care to prey on others.

It may seem curious to the inhabitant of a land where men pay for the privilege of having policemen, to find a country where men pay for the privilege of being policemen. This, however, is the system in Persia. When this is understood, it naturally accounts for a good deal, and the intending traveller would do

well to go prepared with a knowledge that he may have to guard himself against the police.

Once the position of the guardians of the Persian law is recognized, they may be made interesting and pleasant companions for the short distances they will go with you until they find that you refuse to be swindled. They are a delightful mixture of bravado and cunning. To all the Eastern capability for double-dealing they add all the Eastern love of glitter and bombast. The Persian policeman is a peculiar blend of the swashbuckler and the burglar, and, as such, is an interesting study in both national character and scientific 'crime'—if that can be called crime which here, indeed, may be deprecated, but in the East is one of the recognized professions. The *tufangchi* seems to take an equal delight in the midnight plundering of a caravan and in dashing wildly at a full gallop, standing in his stirrups, his reins loose about his horse's neck, to fire at, and invariably miss, a crow which is perched on a telegraph-pole. Like many an Oriental, he is a great child endowed with the wisdom of ages. He is as simple as a schoolboy, and has a cleverness which might, at all events in Persia, utterly baffle a Cabinet Minister. While the intelligent foreigner is being amused by his antics, he is at the same time probably being confounded by his cunning. Poor, soft-hearted Pierre Loti (the only defect of whose journal of a journey through Persia is that, owing to the season of the year, he had to make it by night, and, consequently, saw for the most part only sunrises, sunsets, and phantoms of his own imagination) appears to have fallen an easy prey to the wily Persian policeman. He made the mistake of believing what they said, and consequently was not only in a perpetual fear of imaginary robbers, but in

constant process of paying for guards whom he did not need, and who considered their duties done when they had received payment for their unnecessary services.

At length, however, he begins to suspect something may be wrong, and when his 'cavaliers,' for such he calls them, shabbily leave him, by no means for the first time, alone and undefended in the desert, he pathetically remarks: 'Ici, mes trois cavaliers d'escorte viennent me saluer fort gracieusement et prendre congé. Ils n'iront pas plus loin, car, disent-ils, ce serait sortir des limites de leur territoire. Je m'en doutais, qu'ils me lâcheraient comme ceux d'hier. Menaces ou promesses, rien n'y fait; ils s'en retournent et nous sommes livrés à nous-mêmes!' Personally, I always refused to meet the police on a commercial or official basis. As companions, I was grateful for their company; as policemen, I refused to have anything to do with them. Up would come two or three of these charming ruffians and pour forth their tales of imaginary terrors. It was interesting to hear them, and I always used to listen, and get my Afghan interpreter to translate what was too deep for my understanding; but when they had finished I used to point to the rifles which I and my servants carried, and say with a smile, 'We also are *tufangchis*.' After a little they used to realize that I meant what I said, and depart with many blessings on their lips, and, I have no doubt, plenty of curses in their heart. But that is the way of Persia.

The Persian police interested me so much that I conducted a little unofficial investigation into their manners and methods. The results of these investigations resolved themselves into a small treatise on Persian thieving.

Thieving is practised in one form or another by

almost every one in Persia when opportunity offers ; but the most skilled exponents are probably the Government officials, known as *tufangchis*, who have just been described. They are posted at intervals up and down the trade routes, nominally to guard the road ; but actually they only do this in so far that they secure a practical monopoly of the available thieving and extortion thereon. For these services it is perhaps natural that they do not receive pay from the Government. As a matter of fact, as I have hinted before, they actually pay for the privilege of their official position, and I understood that, just before my visit, the Governor of Borazjun, a small town in the desert between the southern rock wall of Persia and the sea, had received 450 tomans from his *tufangchis*. In fact, they amount to professional, armed robbers under the protection of the powers that be. It is not to be supposed that they will not loyally serve the State if they can themselves indulge in a certain amount of private malpractice for their own profit. They will honestly do their duty to those above them if they are allowed to dishonestly do their duty to those below them ; but that is more or less a principle in the East, to which portion of the globe especially applies the little rhyme :

‘ Great fleas have little fleas upon their backs to bite ’em,
And little fleas have lesser fleas, and so *ad infinitum*.’

That is the system on which the Government is based, and it is scarcely to be wondered at that the voracity of the flea is measured by the extent to which he is preyed on, and the extent to which he can prey on his smaller brethren. So it happens that the official guards in Persia consider the passing caravan as their fair spoil, and perform their duties in ac-

cordance with that assumption. As to the caravans themselves, not only do they resignedly acquiesce in the system of extortion which is generally practised, but the muleteers, being for the most part not the owners but merely the carriers of the goods under their charge, are not disposed to be too vigilant with a view to preventing the other and more secret methods by which the *tufangchi* gains his living. This is where I found an interesting field for investigation, and judicious inquiry and observation resulted in some curious revelations.

The Persian police are provided with the most elaborate tools for the thieving which they practise in addition to their more legitimate exactions on the road. Various goods are brought down the main trade routes of Persia, and they have various methods of appropriating them. Even when a consignment of some utterly unaccustomed merchandise appears, they are generally equal to the occasion; and with regard to this I was told a story eloquent of their ingenuity. A well-known English official in Persia had ordered some champagne from Europe, and on its arrival he gave a large dinner-party. All went well until the production of the newly acquired wine, which turned out to be a strange brand indeed. On removing the cork the champagne appeared to be flat to an unusual degree, and on examination it was found that, unfortunately, in place of the excellent vintage ordered, the bottles were filled with nothing more or less than dirty water. As the corks were intact and the bottles apparently whole, a miracle seemed to have taken place, until an acute observer solved the mystery. The *tufangchis* en route had, by means of red-hot wire, bored minute holes in the bottles, from which, with, no doubt, great gusto, they treated themselves

to the luxury of breaking the laws of the Koran in a more than usually satisfactory manner. They then (or more probably on the next day) refilled the bottles from Ruknabad, the Zender Rud, or some other Persian stream—whose waters, however much the Persian poets praise them, cannot be considered the equal of first-class champagne—neatly stopped the wire-holes, repacked the cases, and sent them on to provide for the distinguished dinner-party the little surprise I have described. Such is an example of the resource our Persian policemen show in dealing with a novel situation.

When it is the ordinary trade of the country with which they are concerned, their methods are complete and comprehensive. Some of the merchandise which finds its way down the main mule-track in Persia consists of raw cotton and raw wool. On the road there will often pass a long string of mules, each laden with the fat, closely packed bales, from which a stray tuft protrudes to show what forms the contents. It must be with a peculiar delight that the *tufangchi* deals with these bales ; for his method, in addition to the profit it brings, possesses ingenuity above the average and a certain amount of humour to anyone but the owner of the goods. It is obvious that if any number of *tufangchis* boldly cut open the bales and audaciously took away part of the contents, they would be soon found out and their professional position taken from them—for even in Persia appearances have to be kept up. They therefore have to contrive so that the abstraction of the cotton or wool shall not be noticed until its arrival at its destination, when detection of any individual culprit will be impossible, and the only person to suffer will be the consignee. The procedure is therefore as follows : The guardian

of the road provides himself with a long rod with a roughed end, rather like the cleaning-rod of a gun. Making a small hole in the canvas covering of the bale, he pushes this rod into the very centre thereof, and twists it round and round until it has gathered, at the rough end, a tightly wound mass of cotton or wool; he then withdraws it, and the process may be repeated *ad lib.* He will do this to every bale in a caravan, and as, to outward appearances, everything is exactly the same the next morning, the *charvardar*, or muleteer, blissfully loads them up and goes on his way rejoicing, being happily unconscious of the large hole which is growing in the middle of each of his bales, some of which, when opened, will practically consist of mere walls.

Another merchandise that the *tufangchis* are fond of dealing with is the cotton stuff, cloth, and so on, which goes up-country from England, India, or Russia. It would seem rather a difficult matter to steal this, as each bale of goods is packed as tightly as the stuff can be rolled and pressed, and is secured by firmly clamped iron bands. Any attempt to drag a piece out would soon show that ordinary methods of thieving must in this case be abandoned. This does not disconcert our friend the *tufangchi*. He is the possessor of two long, flat, iron slips, and with these he approaches to do his work.

It is the clear stillness of the Persian night. The bales are piled up in the caravanserai, or on the sandy floor of the desert. The *charvardar* and his men are lulled in a fat and comfortable sleep. The only noise is the shuffling of the tired mules and the occasional tinkle of a little bell. The *tufangchi* quietly manipulates a bale into a convenient position; then he deftly forces one of the thin iron slips through the cloth,

finding a place between two separate pieces. A little further down, and again between two pieces of cloth, he pushes through the other slip, and then with a screw he clamps together the ends of this peculiar device, which looks like some variety of trouser press. Sitting on the ground, he next places his feet securely against the bale, and, seizing the slips firmly, gives a hearty pull. Out comes the contrivance, bringing with it, of course, the enclosed piece of cloth. The remaining pieces, relieved a little of their pressure, gratefully swell up, and no trace is left of the operation.

Moist sugar is a favourite article of theft, and is extracted from the canvas bags it is in in the following way: Cutting an almost imperceptible hole in the canvas, the *tufangchi* thrusts a pipe straight into the centre of the bag. With a little persuasion, a steady stream of sugar flows easily through the pipe, and the first intimation the *charvardar* has of this little job is when, after a severe climb up one of the kotals, he notices that some of his sugar-bags have settled down a little.

Lump sugar falls an easy prey; a few lumps from every bale and some pebbles to replace them, and the thing is done.

Glass ornaments, too, and beads are very much the same weight as small stones, nor will anyone notice anything wrong until the end of the journey, when, of course, the foreign element may not have had a very good effect on the condition of the original merchandise.

The specific gravity of tea and straw is practically the same, and so it happens that very frequently at its destination a tea-chest is found to contain a mixture which would produce a rather peculiar brew if put straight into a teapot. But it is obviously not the

fault of anyone in particular. No one can be brought to book, and, after all, the only loser is the merchant, so what does the *charvardar* care? The *charvardar*, indeed, never cares very much ;—as I have said, he is only the carrier, and not the owner, of the goods, and, as a matter of fact, he is not above aiding and abetting the rather shady practices of his friend the policeman if he finds it makes life easier for him. He often manages to make such things as almonds and nuts ‘come right’ in weight at the end of a journey, despite some considerable ‘wastage’ on the way.. In fact, a load has been known to have unaccountably increased in weight during its journey. This, however, may be explained by the fact that wet almonds weigh more than dry ones.

The science of thieving is probably far deeper and more abstruse than anything indicated by the above few examples, but they will serve to give some idea of the incidents of commerce in Persia, and, indeed, in the East generally. Is it to be wondered at that prices are high, commerce precarious, and progress a practical impossibility? If the East is to have a commercial future, it must substitute the methods of business for those of the bazaar, and the fundamental question underlying the whole is the question of better and more upright government.

I have strayed far from my two *tufangchis* who rode up to me that winter day on the south coast of Persia. The Persian policeman and his wily ways were not then so well known to me, and I stood in danger of being added to the list of innocent foreigners who had fallen a prey to him in the past. Having, however, learned with regret, but with a tolerable amount of certainty, that in the East, at all events, the first principle of existence must be one of

suspicion and distrust, I was disinclined too readily to accept their advances. They insisted on danger; I persisted in assuring them that I needed no protection. At last, with the help of the faithful Saif, I convinced them that I was equal to defending myself even from them, and they reluctantly disappeared into the dusk.

So at length the start was made. The wandering, aimless mules were again collected, were given, as it were, an impetus into the desert to start them on their weary journey, and we were off on our first march from sea to sea. In the dim light the wide, open plain stretched before us to the solid obscurity, into which a little before the black line of rocky hills had sunk. There was a strange stillness as the night came up from the East, and while the whole world went to bed my little caravan pushed out into the mysterious darkness. The vague, level expanse into which we went was not quite desert, but utterly deserted. There was no life, no sound; all was wrapped in a desolate silence.

There was something peculiarly eerie in setting out thus alone into this strange Eastern land. High above the stars came out, bringing with them that ghostly light which is almost more confounding than the dark itself. I sat on my pony, not guiding, but guided. Patiently we both plodded on, to the monotonous tone of the caravan bells. All around there were shufflings and scufflings and tinklings. No one spoke. The march was too long to be livened with words. The only noise was the noise of invisible feet and of unseen bells. The Eastern monotony soothed and drowned the senses into a soft, wakeful sleep. I curiously thought, 'Eternity must be something like this'; but, while I was thinking, there came a rude interruption which sent eternity and sleep flying. Just to the left there

was heard a hideous clang, and in a moment arose a din indescribable. Wild things were heard rushing through the darkness. The monotonous tinkle-tankle of the bells rose to a sudden hoarse clashing. Even my pony, which had seemed incapable of any movement beyond a walk, made a valiant attempt to bolt. Saif fell from his charger heavily, and immediately begged my pardon ;—why I cannot imagine.

The cause of this commotion was a simple one, and I had recognized it from the first. Any Anglo-Indian will know the 'bath-tin.' There is not very much that an Indian native cannot make out of an empty kerosine-tin, and one of the most obvious applications thereof is a vessel for heating water for 'master's' bath. A small hole cut in the top is all that is necessary to complete this useful article, and no native servant will go anywhere without it (from which I infer, by the way, that its use is as essential to his own comfort as to his master's). It was this confounded kerosine-tin which was the source of all our trouble. Persian mules do not understand Indian bath-tins, so when the loosely strapped thing fell to the ground and bounced away with that appalling clamour peculiar to large, empty tin vessels, it was altogether too much for even my sedate caravan. Every mule bolted, anywhere and everywhere. My little procession, so orderly a moment ago, was forthwith scattered far and wide, straying about the desert. My heart fell. Such a catastrophe so early in the day ! and the first halt so far off ! If this were a sample of what to expect, when on earth should we arrive ?

There is something very paralysing in the dark ; and, sitting on my mule, alone but for the dismounted Saif, the mules faintly tinkling here and there in the black, still void, I felt uncommonly helpless. Then

the search began. The first thing we found was a mule disconsolately standing in the dark with its load abjectly hanging under its 'tummy.' Its disconsolateness, I imagine, was due to the fact that it had been prematurely arrested in its course, and immediately on our disburdening it, it promptly proceeded to carry out its former intention, and disappeared into the night. As you cannot bring a load to a mule, it is necessary to bring the mule to the load, and, what with being unable to find the mule, and then being unable to find the load, it was quite a quarter of an hour before even this culprit was again in order. Meanwhile, the other mules had been laboriously collected, their loads readjusted, and we were again ready to set off. Just at this moment my servant, Kishna, picked up the tin with a warning rattle. I seized it firmly from him, and marooned it fifty yards away in the desert. It is practically impossible to keep a kerosine-tin quiet, and under the circumstances it seemed likely to prove an expensive luxury. (As, however, I knew the mind and habits of the Indian native, I was not so surprised as I might have been to find next morning the tin had come to camp.)

A shuffling silence took the place of the hoarse shouts and cursings that had so lately profaned the night, and my little caravan resumed its persevering plodding into the darkness.

Whether by some intuition the other beasts knew that my pony carried the leader of the expedition, or whether the animal itself was a sort of 'bell-wether' among mules, I do not know; but the fact was that I found, to my discomfort, that to me apparently fell the proud duty of directing the whole expedition. Where I went everything else went too, and sometimes so faithful was their adherence that I found myself jostled

and scraped by corners of square boxes, large iron bells, and furry foreheads. After a time this damaged both my knees and my temper. It seemed impossible to overcome this persistent fidelity; nothing would rid me of these turbulent beasts. In vain I slapped at soft noses which came out of the darkness and rubbed themselves upon me with provoking and pertinacious affection; in vain I first appealed to them persuasively, and then used the most threatening language I could command in every tongue I knew;—they would not go. I suddenly became reminded of a ridiculous ‘turn’ I had once seen at one of the London theatres, where a wretched little man gets himself involved in a piece of fly-paper, which, in spite of every effort to dislodge it (terminating in a delirious roll on the hearthrug, after which it appears in the middle of his back), sticks to him with a determination which, in the end, almost drives him past the borders of sanity. It was too ridiculous, and in spite of my sore knees, and temper, I could not help laughing. But something had to be done,—the expedition’s affection for their leader must be dissembled. I determined to try an experiment. Calling a halt, I gave orders that a peculiarly offensive bell which hung round my pony’s neck should be reduced to silence. When we went on, instead of the blatant tones which before signalled my whereabouts, there only arose a muffled clank. The experiment was a triumphant success. Stripped of his musical dignity, the rest of the expedition no longer recognized their chief, and he pursued a path, perhaps less honoured, but certainly more comfortable.

At ten o’clock on the northern horizon there began to dimly appear a jagged black line. A growing radiance suffused the northern sky, until, at last, part of the line of peaks stood out sharp-cut against a huge

silver circle, which gradually lifted itself clear into the black heavens—the Ramazan moon! It was a weird, lonely scene. Ahead, towering into the sky, the gaunt black range rose out of a silver mist; all around, the white, immeasurable plain stretching away, so vague and shimmering was the light, it might be a hundred yards or a hundred miles, and losing itself in a dim infinity; here and there, lurching along, the black mass of a mule; straight in front of me the dark shape of Saif on his plodding beast, scuffling along and scattering the dust into a phosphorescent wake behind him. . . .

So we wandered on and on interminable distances to the monotonous throbbing of the mule-bells, until, at last, dead tired, we rode into our first camping-ground, Khushab, a mere blot of black outlined trees on the dim sameness all round.

Who has arrived at the night's halt with a caravan on its first march,—arrived at midnight? Whoever has can appreciate what trials of unlading and feeding mules, unpacking and arranging goods, had to be gone through by us all before I at last found myself inside a most inebriated-looking tent, attacking a piece of cold mutton and dry bread. He will also know that I cared nothing about the tent's appearance as long as it held up!

It was 1.30 on a clear, cold Persian morning. Outside, the moon shone from her place high in the sky upon my little collection of men and beasts and boxes. One by one sounds died away; men moved no more; even the mules only broke the solemn silence by now and then a soft snort.

At length the little oasis in the great desert sank into profound stillness; the dying night had bestowed her long-withheld 'great gift of sleep.'

CHAPTER III

A VAGABOND LIFE

‘Give to me the life I love,
Let the lave go by me;
Give the jolly heaven above
And the byway nigh me.’

R. L. STEVENSON.

It is good to be a savage sometimes ;—an ideal savage. The ideal savage is not a rude, uncultivated, and ignorant barbarian, but a highly civilized man who can yet go back to nature and live for a time on a plane of primitive simplicity. He will lead a life which is far above that of most others on that plane, for he has what they have not : appreciation—appreciation of what he possesses and of what he is rid of ; appreciation of freedom, of the absence of petty trifles, of the broader, larger life, of the great wonders of nature. While he is not ignorant of what that life lacks, he does not, like his uncivilized brother, indifferently take for granted what that life can give. The ideal savage is, in fact, essentially a temporary being, a visitor in Savage-land. Otherwise there is no ideal savage. As Mr. H. G. Wells has said, ‘That large, naked, virtuous, pink, Natural Man, drinking pure spring-water, eating the fruits of the earth, and living to ninety in the open air, is a fantasy—he never was nor will be. The real savage is a nest of parasites within and without ; he smells, he rots, he starves.’

The ordinary savage is, in fact, simple with the simplicity of ignorance; the ideal savage must be simple with the simplicity of knowledge. He is not dirty, because he knows that he can be simple and yet be clean, and that it is better to be clean; he is not rough and coarse, because he knows it is necessary to be gentle and civil. In fact, while he adopts the substance of simplicity, he retains the soul of civilization. He is, moreover, a master of the art of doing without, and it is a great art to know. It brings some inconveniences, but many and great delights. It teaches what is unnecessary and what is essential—what, in fact, is worth having in the world. A great number of rich people never learn this; a far greater number of poor people can never rise to a position to learn it. The latter are the more unfortunate, for they, by always having to do without a great deal, never attain much that is good; but the former are almost as greatly to be pitied, for, in the midst of a chaos of good and bad, they often waste almost as much time on what is worthless as they spend on what is profitable. Sometimes, indeed, these latter, like their brethren at the other end of the scale, may be said to be prevented by their very position from a true knowledge of what is best. By circumstances, the one class is precluded from ever possessing the benefits of culture, and the other from ever attaining to the delights of simplicity.

I can picture our ideal savage addressing one of the human products of this latest phase in the world's existence somewhat in this manner: 'You, sir, have great advantages. Your education has taught you to appreciate what your position enables you to possess. For your enjoyment the world contributes its choicest; to gratify your every sense, you can obtain and

thoroughly delight in the most delicate dainties. You no doubt, and very naturally, imagine that you have attained the highest point, that you are sucking the best out of life. And yet—and yet—you are missing a great deal. Very likely you have never been so tired that your limbs will not move, and then grasped the bliss of sleep. Perhaps it has never been your lot to feel clad for comfort instead of for appearance, the joy of a free world before you, and a free spirit to enjoy it. I do not expect you have ever been so hungry that you have had fondly to make the most of every morsel of a scanty dish of rice in order that your dog might not go unfed. Yet all such things are worth experiencing. You could with profit sometimes visit this *terra incognita*. You are missing a part of life.'

Yes, indeed, there is a delight in meeting the great, raw, elementary things of existence ; in fresh air and simple food ; in rising in the keen, early morning with a sense of clean strength ; even, there is a delight in being disreputable. Not in being dirty, that is a different matter, but in being just disreputable ;—in wearing a flannel shirt open at the neck, a loose, warm jacket, a workmanlike pair of trousers, putties that have grown old by faithful service, and boots that are meant to stand, not criticism, but weather. Yet there are many who I do not think could ever be comfortably disreputable. I knew a man once who would even mend a motor-car without crushing his waistcoat or soiling his immaculate gloves. But as for me, I have always revelled in now and again throwing off the conventions and costume of decent civilization and becoming a mere barbarian.

So it was with a little thrill of pleasure that I woke in the early, shining morning at Kushab, and realized

I was free, my own master, and chief of a little caravan setting forth into a strange land.

Shivering into my clothes after a semi-sponge-down, which is all the tribute that the would-be savage can sometimes pay to the virtue which comes next to godliness, I sat down to the first real meal I had had the fortune to taste for some thirty hours. It was not sumptuous; it was curry prepared in a peculiar manner by my younger servant, who was learning cooking, and practising upon me. But one of the joys of intelligent savagery is that it teaches, perhaps, the greatest lesson that can be learned: that it is not the thing, but you yourself, that are of first importance in life. So it comes about that a crust or a curry, when you are in the proper frame of mind, is worth a Lord Mayor's banquet when your soul is sick and your digestion out of order. Just as Stevenson said that to wash in one of God's rivers in the open air seemed to him 'a sort of cheerful solemnity or semi-pagan act of worship,' and that 'while to dabble among dishes in a bedroom might perhaps make clean the body, the imagination took no share in such a cleansing,' so a meal under the open sky off homely fare and in the simplest manner acquires some sort of added virtue. It is not only that it is more enjoyable (and where, inside a house, will you find the zest it brings?), but that, to the imagination of our cultured barbarian, it presents the idea of some kind of primitive rite, some little sacrifice on the altar of nature.

I, at all events, enjoyed my breakfast under the palm-trees upon the sand, and, after a period of packing and loading, rather prolonged by reason of its novelty, my caravan again set off into the scorching desert.

Always ahead, and scarcely ever any nearer, rose

the great mountain wall. Little by little the eyes had to be raised higher to scan the topmost peaks ; that was the only sign that we were approaching the time when it would be our duty to assault their forbidding flanks. Now and again there came a blessed relief to the surrounding yellow desolation in the form of a little patch of green date-palms ; otherwise there stretched before, behind, and around in the midday heat, a sweltering, scentless, soundless expanse of barren sand.

By the cruel irony of nature, however, it has been ordained that when the heart of a traveller is most overwhelmed by the lonely desolation on every side, when most his lips crave for moisture and his ears for the sound of running water, there comes to his eyes a dim mocking prospect of a wonderland which, like some Tantalus-feast, always before him, can never be enjoyed.

Far in the distance, as I plodded patiently, hour after hour, over the desert, the horrid monotony of sand and stone faded into a lovely glassy sea, dotted with islets of palm. Dancing and changing, it was there, incredibly real, before my eyes. Often I could swear that, not two miles away, there lay before me a vast lake. The trees were reflected in its still waters ; out of it rose a tiny isle crowned with a temple which, so wonderful is this fantastic trick of nature, had its counterpart faithfully mirrored below it. As I approached, it danced away and away, and ever away before me, until suddenly I came to the tiny isle—a patch of barren rock—and saw close to me my fairy temple—the gaunt white bones of some long-dead beast.

It is not only an Eldorado the mirage-master can produce. What was this vast army, this multitude

of men, marching on in a twinkling, ever-changing mass? What were those strange, tall, superhuman creatures, with their ten-foot limbs and huge heads? Nearer, and a little nearer;—suddenly, lo! a caravan of a few mules and a couple of Persian mule-drivers. That was all.

At last to my eyes, weary and amazed with the fantastic freaks played upon them, there appeared a fortress behind some date-palms, which did not, like the wonders which had played before my eyes for the last hours, melt away as I rode up to it.

At Borazjun—for that was the name of the village which lay near the ‘fortress’ (which turned out a fine caravanserai)—I found the first rest-house of the Indo-European Telegraphs. These rest-houses, primarily intended for the superintendents of the line, are dotted at intervals all the way up the main trade route from Bushire to the Caspian, and the officials are most generous in allowing travellers to make use of them on their journeyings. Sometimes they are detached buildings, sometimes they are specially apportioned parts of the common caravanserai; but, in any case, it is a great benefit to be allowed to camp in them, instead of in the frequently filthy little rooms otherwise available. I had often occasion to bless those who so kindly enabled me to make use of the advantages of these havens of refuge. There is generally a man who has the special duty of keeping them clean. They are neat and whitewashed; the doorway has a door, and it will actually shut and even lock, while even in the most out-of-the-way places, they usually run to the extravagant luxury of a wash-hand basin. There are fables of one rest-house where there is actually a tooth-brush—chained to the wall!

I passed a peaceful evening at Borazjun in spite of

the ruffianly looking appearance of the inhabitants, who, apparently because they have many feuds, consider it essential to load themselves with rifles, pistols, and knives. They brought a madman for me to see ; but after some difficulty I made them understand that I was not a doctor, and they sadly took him away.

To my horror, on waking after a night of the dreamless sleep that comes after severe bodily fatigue, I found it was already half-past six, and that my retinue, as tired, apparently, as myself, showed no signs of life.

On such a journey as I was making, in order to comfortably arrange matters after arrival at the end of a long march, and to give time for the proper preparation of a meal, it is absolutely necessary to make an early start. I gave orders, therefore, that loading was to be completed by daybreak, and also that everything, except what was definitely wanted, was to be packed overnight. I was beginning to find that, even with the greatest forethought, there are many unimagined difficulties to be overcome. It was necessary to deal, not only with things—the laws of which are more or less comprehensible—but with men, who are a law unto themselves.

Here it is that any military training in which the art of understanding and managing human beings is acquired becomes most valuable. A true officer—one who does not look upon the body of men under him as merely so much machinery, but as a collection of human beings to be governed, not by clockwork, but by tact and understanding—will always make a good traveller. He has the knack (with which he is, perhaps, endowed mainly by the position he has been used to occupy) of commanding men, and he has, in addition, the knowledge of human nature which only dealings with it can

give. He is handy and resourceful, can cheerfully face, and generally overcome, difficulties, and has a practical acquaintance with many little tricks and expedients which he has learned in the course of his military duties. But let no one imagine that mere authority is all that is necessary, and that a man who can repeat the drill-book by heart and has a loud voice and authoritative manner will, by these qualities alone, find himself able to make a success of such a business as running a caravan. He, indeed, is not, in the strictest sense, a good officer. He may do very well while nothing more than machinery is wanted, but in a situation calling for the higher powers of the true officer he will fail. Probably, on a journey in Persia he would often find himself in great difficulties. There are no men who need more patience and more tact, if they are to be properly managed, than the Persians. Independent, high-spirited, usually lazy and always cunning, they sometimes reduce the traveller to sheer despair of ever getting anything done at all. If, however, he can win their friendship and attain their respect, things are not so hopeless. If he can shoot, if he shows a knowledge of men and affairs, a readiness in surmounting difficulties and picking up knowledge, and an astuteness which makes it difficult for them to swindle him, the Persians will help him where they would drive others to the verge of lunacy. One thing our friend had better learn from the start—and it is a lesson that is useful in more places than Persia—that if he wishes to get a thing done he should first know how to do it himself. He need not necessarily be so proficient that he can do it with the speed he requires from others, nor need he indeed ever actually do it himself (to learn how to do a thing and then get others to do it is one of the secrets of success), but he should at

least know the method and manner of its accomplishment. Let him, for instance, study the science of loading a mule, and even try to do it with his own hands; he will then be, at the same time, more reasonable in his demands and more exacting in requiring a proper fulfilment of them.

Would that people throughout life would put this theory a little more into practice, and endeavour by this and other means to realize, at all events to some extent, the tasks that they impose upon others. The world's work would then, perhaps, proceed with less friction and more efficiency.

Following out my preaching, I had myself already looked into the matter of mule-loading. The opportunities of doing this are frequent—too frequent, perhaps, especially on the passes—and the study, if discouraging, is, at all events, profitable. The actual packing of the beast is not all that is to be learned. The faculty for perceiving the precise place for each individual article is in itself an art. By lending a hand in the loading a few times as an unabashed tyro, and by displaying a cheerful interest in such homely matters, I not only became more able to command and criticize, but got on much more friendly terms with my mule-drivers, whom I found to be good, kindly men, and as honest as could be expected of Persians of their class.

We were now, in good truth, getting close up under the mountains. The ground, from a sandy desert, became an undulating, stone-strewn wilderness, dotted everywhere with a little shrubby tree, called *guz*, of which, so I was told, the leaves can be boiled to produce a khaki dye. At this point persistent plodding on a Persian mule for many miles had begun to make me unpleasantly aware of the fact that man is in posses-

sion of a rudimentary tail, and a walk, even on the abominable cross between a pebbly beach and a desert which did duty for soil, was a relief.

Thus tramping and stumbling along, I happened to look round upon my beast, which was tramping and stumbling behind me, and noticed that its nostrils were slit. I have heard it explained that this is done in order to allow the mules 'to breathe more freely ascending the kotals.' But, in reality, I believe the reason is that sometimes when he is drinking a mule gets little leeches up his nostrils, and that it is in order to extract these creatures that they are cut.

The man who goes through a foreign country as a sightseer through a picture-gallery, dumbly gazing at nature and at man, as though it all were a mere spectacle instead of a living problem, loses much of the interest of his voyage. I had made up my mind long ago that, in whatever countries of the world I travelled, I would try as far as possible to absorb, not only the sights, but also the spirit of the land. This is only to be done by much laborious and painstaking effort; by struggles to understand and overcome prejudice; by patience with foreign customs and steady perseverance in the acquisition of a foreign tongue; by taking the trouble to try and become acceptable to even a chance acquaintance; by endeavours to initiate stray conversations and by skill in sustaining them; by an unfailingly cheerful and friendly demeanour; by acute observation, quick perception, and omnivorous interest. By such means, and by such alone, can a true knowledge of a foreign land be attained—can, that is to say, the object of travel be truly realized. So now, as we jogged along, assisted by my friend Saif, I made some first raw efforts at a chat with my muleteers and a

casual wayfarer, whose path happened to be the same as ours.

I was beginning to realize the Persians more. At first their method of conversation proves a trifle annoying, and apt, with a stranger, to lead to misunderstandings. The Persian whom you will meet on the road generally talks at the top of his voice, as if engaged in an excited argument. He cranes his head until his face is within a few inches of yours, and then bellows in an aggressive voice some perfectly inoffensive remark. I came to the conclusion that in the case of muleteers this must come of trying to talk above the concert of mule-bells, which renders the progress of a caravan audible for several miles, and the tones of an ordinary voice inaudible at any distance above a foot. Whatever the reason, the result is at first painful, and until I began more easily to understand the gist of their remarks, I was under the impression that my friendly conversationalists were perpetually insulting me.

Another thing I began to discover about this time was that in Persia it is apparently considered a breach of etiquette to speak the precise truth. Even in the highest circles exaggeration is a politeness, and, as might be expected, this leads, lower down, to lying becoming an accomplishment and a pride. Even in matters in which no possible benefit could accrue from being inexact, the Persian will rarely so far depart from the national code as to speak the miserable, inglorious truth. At first this proves irritating, and frequently disconcerting; but after a time what might be termed the scale of Persian equivalents is arrived at, and then things become more easy.

An instance was not far to seek to-day. In the course of my conversation with my fellow-wayfarer,

who, I found, was travelling to Kazerun, I happened to mention that I had heard that there was petroleum to be found somewhere near where we were at the moment. The Kazeruni immediately became animated, and jabbered away to Saif in a manner which was quite unintelligible to me. I asked what he said. 'He says,' replied Saif, 'that an Englishman lived here for two years not long ago, and brought five hundred men to carry out some borings for petroleum. He says ten thousand men, but it is really five hundred.'

The trusty Saif had reduced the gentleman's remark to English and fact at the same time—without comment—by the aid of the aforesaid scale of Persian equivalents.

I was singularly unversed in Persian religious history, and I grieve to confess that I had never heard, until our conversation touched on the fact, that the Persians are waiting for the Twelfth Imam. He is the last of these prophets, and he has been on earth once already; but they are now waiting for him to come back, when he will rule all Persia and do wondrous deeds. Everything will then be set right, and the way of the world will run smooth. It will be the Persian millennium. This theological theory may perhaps explain the prevailing inclination in Persia to do nothing. What is the use of doing anything if the Twelfth Imam may turn up the next moment and do everything for you? It seems a satisfactory explanation. Until this I had been forced to imagine that the Persian frame of mind was only an accentuation of the prevailing sentiment of the East, where the maxim is, 'Everything comes to him who waits,' and so everybody waits for things to come.

Thus, riding until it became necessary to walk, and

walking until it was pleasanter to ride, we plodded on until there became no doubt that we were approaching some very unusual natural phenomenon. This was signalized by a most unpleasant smell. It must not be imagined that an unpleasant smell is an unusual occurrence in Persia; in the civilized portions it is the rule and not the exception. But this was such a peculiar and unique smell that it was at once set down as something out of the ordinary Persian *répertoire*. Sulphuretted hydrogen combined with petroleum would convey some idea of its distinctive characteristic, and with feelings of mingled interest and disgust we awaited the explanation of the mystery. In a moment or two it came, when we rode up to a brilliant green stream running over slimy pink stones between crumbling yellowish-white banks. Dipping the hand into it, the water was warm. Despite the really terrible odour, we tracked the stream to its source. Some pools of hot sulphurous water bubbled out from among green slime and mud fringed with a yellow crystalline deposit. I myself could only struggle against an inclination to be ill long enough to take a photograph, but Saif seemed to revel in it, took off his clothes, bathed in the almost boiling water, and said he felt much refreshed. As I passed thankfully back again to the track down a decrescendo of smell, I noticed black lumps of bitumen bobbing down the current. Undoubtedly there is petroleum, but where no one has hitherto been able to discover.

Another stream, smelling less of sulphur but more of oil, burst from under the rocks a little further on, and it is near here that attempts have been made in the past to tap the petroleum reservoir which probably exists somewhere beneath the ground. Some day a happy man may hit the right spot, and then his

fortune is made; but it is a speculative business. Half a dozen inches to the right or left, and you are, as Fate may decide, a pauper or a millionaire. Moreover, it is quite possible that the oil is inextricably mixed with the hot springs which bubble from the rock, in which case it would be at present beyond the power of man to make any profitable use of it.

By the way, it has occurred to me, as doubtless it has occurred to others before me, although I have never seen the idea set down, that the ancient religion of fire-worship which the Persian so long professed may have had some connexion with these great reservoirs of oil that exist in various parts of the Near East. Various things incline to confirm this theory. At Baku, on the Caspian, I saw fountains of oil spraying into the air and trickling away in sickly, sluggish black streams. Moreover, once, when I was in Canada, sitting one evening in the club at Calgary, close by the Rocky Mountains, I heard a tale, sufficiently authentic, from a gruff, tanned pioneer who had travelled much in that land of mysterious possibilities which lies to the far north-west of Canada. There, he said, he had once heard a strange roaring as of a distant fall of water. On nearer approach, it turned out that fire, and not water, was the cause of the sound. A fountain of flame and smoke—a pillar of cloud by day and of fire by night—shot into the air with a thunder of noise that could be heard for several miles. How it had come no one seemed to know, but there it was, and there it had been for years.

Is it not possible that on a smaller scale some such phenomenon might have given rise, in the days when men marvelled more and knew less, to at all events the first miracle of the eternal fire, and that from this beginning arose and spread the worship of the god of

the perpetual flame? This seems the more possible inasmuch as there appears to have been one supreme centre of fire-worship, wherefrom the other shrines took their sanctity.

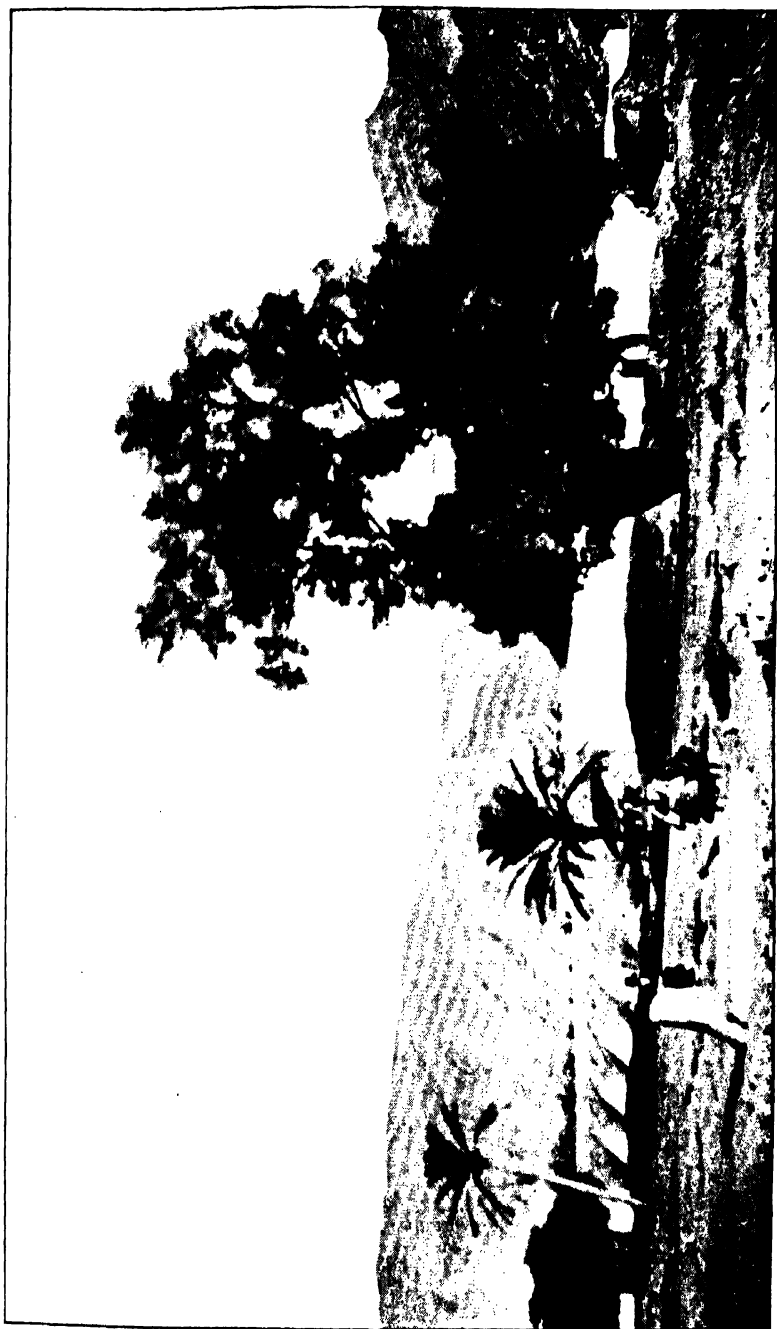
Dr. Fryer in his Journal says of this sacred fire: 'If by Chance they should let it go out, they must take a Pilgrimage to *Carmania*, where their most Sacred Fire was never extinguished, as if it were a Piacular Wickedness to attempt the renewing of it elsewhere, that being preserved by a more than Vestal Care, from the first time the Sun, their Chief Deity, was pleased to enlighten it with Sparks from its own Rays.' The flame itself does not seem to have been any very great affair. Tavernier relates: 'One day, being at *Kerman*, I desired to see that Fire, but they answered me, they could not permit me. For say they, one day the *Kan* of *Kerman* being desirous to see the Fire, not daring to do otherwise, they threw it him. He it seems expected to see some extraordinary Brightness; but when he saw no more than what he might have seen in a Kitchen or a Chamber fire, fell a swearing and spitting upon't as if he had been mad. Whereupon the Sacred Fire being thus profaned, flew away in the form of a white Pigeon. The Priests considering then their misfortune, which had happened through their own indiscretion, fell to their Prayers with the People, and gave Alms; upon which, at the same time, and in the same form the Sacred Fire returned to its place, which makes them so shy to throw it again.'

My theory may not be worth much, but it might, perhaps, be worth the while of prospectors to pay a casual glance to those spots in which tradition says there once existed a sacred flame of the fire-worshippers.

After all, however, no elaborate explanation is really necessary to account for primitive fire-worship. The sun surely, the great giver of warmth and comfort, the force that makes the grass to spring from the earth and the flowers to burst into bloom, the power that represents all that is most pleasant and profitable to the primitive mind;—surely the sun is the most obvious object of worship for a savage whose mind knows little of science, and whose imagination is awaking from sleep?

Speculating on such matters, mundane and philosophical, I rode away from the strange freaks Nature has indulged in in this region, and found that my 'pony,' influenced possibly by the desire to get away from such offensive odours, was actually capable of moving at more than a walk. Indeed, when, as the sun just passed the zenith, we rode into the date-groves of Daliki, the pace had risen to what might almost be called a canter.

The little green oasis is set close at the foot of the outlying buttresses of the great mountain wall. Nature runs riot, indeed, in this strange place. It is as if she had taken out her colour-box, intending to paint some splendid scene, and in a fit of carelessness had strewn her paint here and there among the hills and over the plains. Yellow sulphur ridges stand out clear against pale green hills beyond, while behind the whole runs a pink vista of more distant peaks. The rivers are green or tinged with a sickly yellowish-white, patches of vivid verdure are scattered over the brown-yellow plain, and over all stretches, like some gorgeous painted canopy, the unflecked dome of the dark blue Eastern sky. A wild chaos of colour this. It is something else;—it is an advertisement, for Nature does not paint without a reason, and there is more in all this



DALIKI.

than empty colour effect. As Pierre Loti remarks, descending for once and a way from the heights of picturesque imagination to the plane of commonplace reality : ' Il doit y avoir d'immenses richesses métallurgiques, encore inexploitées et inconnues, dans ces montagnes.'

Enterprise which could defy the climate and overcome the Persian disinclination to work could, it can scarcely be doubted, find good use for the resources which Nature advertises in such striking mode. But, alas ! he who sets himself to develop the unexploited potentialities of Persia has to contend with great difficulties. Once upon a time, in the days of the nation's greatness, the Persian must have been industrious and energetic. The mere fact that the land in those days was productive is sufficient to show that this was so ; but to-day he prefers to see the land waste and his country decaying, as long as he can exist in idleness, rather than put himself to trouble in order to develop his nation's possibilities and build up its fortunes.

There, just before me, in Daliki was an instance of this. Down the valley there ran a river, to which, as the sun descended, I went down, and in whose ice-cold, limpid waters I had a refreshing bathe. In the clear depths moved great fishes, untroubled by any interfering fishermen, and the channel along which the water flowed so smoothly was cut through untilled fields and barren ground. As I thought of the great dusty plains of India, painfully and laboriously made fruitful by the exertions of countless oxen patiently dragging water by cupfuls from the recesses of the earth, and by the tedious care of millions of men, perpetually toiling that each drop should find its use, I felt a kind of bitter resentment against a people who

so carelessly neglected riches which others would so eagerly welcome. There was a people poverty-stricken, a country waste, and the precious, precious water idly flowing by. It was very sad. The material was there, but the mind was asleep. Will the mind ever awake?

Behind the town again, from the Eastern hills, there bubbled forth, as I found when pursuing a chance partridge a little later, a spring, which from time immemorial had perennially poured its waters down through the village into the larger stream in the valley. All its apparently unfailing resources are put to just two uses: the turning of a single mill, and the irrigation of one little patch of half-cultivated land. One wondered that the very waters did not cry out as they bubbled between their tiny banks, and that the grassy turf which lined those banks did not tell the eyes of the idle villager of his wasted wealth. Such turfy banks they were! No one who has not lived in lands where the earth cracks, and the poor blades of grass grow yellow and die, can realize the joy of a few square feet of green English turf and the music of a running stream. I stood still and gazed at it. I trod delicately upon it as though it were a fine carpet; I even stooped down and patted it with my hand; I had not seen turf for very many months. Then I drank of the stream. I do not think I was really thirsty, but the chance of drinking running water was too precious to be thrown away. All this sounds very ridiculous to an English ear, but—it is never until we lose what we have that we understand its value, and we little realize that many of the things we accept unthinkingly, without gratitude, every day of our lives are practically unknown luxuries to countless less fortunate mortals.

I did not shoot my partridge; it disappeared up the mountains and into the dusk ; but I was rewarded for my chase by a magnificent view of the broad sea-like plain below me, fading dimly away to the real sea into which, as I looked, sank the red rim of the sun.

Daliki lay below, clad in a blue haze, and through the dark *meidan* was drawn the silver thread of my beloved river.

CHAPTER IV

THE KOTALS

‘I got up the mountain edge, and from the top saw the world stretched out—cornlands and forest, the river winding among meadow-flats, and right off, like a hem of the sky, the moving sea, with snatches of foam, and large ships reaching forward, out-bound. And then I thought no more, but my heart leapt to meet the wind, and I ran, and I ran. I felt my legs under me, I felt the wind buffet me, hit me on the cheek; the sun shone, the bees swept past me singing; and I too sang, shouted, “World, world, I am coming!”’—MAURICE HEWLETT: *Pan and the Young Shepherd*.

IN the little village close under the mountains we spent the night, and next day came the kotal at last. We had got off with the first light after an hour of darkness cut by the yellow gleam of lanterns and the myriad confused sounds of mule-loading. I came down early and superintended the general bustle (what was as near an approach to a bustle, that is to say, as a Persian can be incited to). A little way on our journey we turned north-east into the hills;—we were embarked on the first of the great steps which lead to the high tableland of Persia proper.

A kotal is not a nice thing to fall in with on a journey. The hysterics into which some writers, both ancient and modern, have gone into over these passes, the horrors they have described, and the fears to which they were subject, are perhaps a trifle overdone. But certainly these almost indescribable paths

which creep up what, at a short distance, appear to be quite inaccessible precipices, well merit vituperation. Imagine a rough, dry watercourse, filled with debris and stones of various shapes and sizes, ascending in a tortuous manner the sides of an almost vertical slope. Sometimes this 'watercourse' leads through a wilderness of gigantic boulders, steadily rising, and winding vaguely and uncertainly as the forces of Nature direct. A little after, and the way lies close under a towering precipice, while beneath on the right is a sheer drop into a great rocky chasm, the opposite wall of which is another abrupt precipice, streaked with the twisted lines into which some great contortion of elemental forces has bent the rock-strata. There is no vegetation, no green thing, no life of any kind. The whole place is like some rude, unfinished attempt at creation, and the track itself is an effort rather of Nature than of man.

Amid such an impressive and dreadful wilderness we wandered, overshadowed by the jagged peaks, crawling laboriously up the sheer precipices. Our wretched ponies, even those who, as riding animals, were unburdened of their human loads, progressed with heaves and lurches up the uncouth rocky stairs. The other less fortunate beasts, staggering under their packs, which now and again would strike the walled side of the path, moved the heart to pity. Now and again one would fall, and lie there inert and panting until some muleteer came up and got it to its feet again.

Persians do not seem to consider animals anything more than a convenience destined by Allah to be used or ill-used, as the case may be, by man. I do not think this attribute can be set down as exactly a vice; they simply do not recognize that there is any other point of view. An animal, they say, is a means of

locomotion or method of traction, and they treat it exactly as they would any other means of locomotion or method of traction. If a steam-engine goes wrong, we do not pity it, we simply are annoyed at it, and it is the same way with a Persian and a dumb animal.

What is wanted is a change in the moral sense of the people.

In Persia, however, as in the wide world outside, the individual is lamentably powerless against the feeling of the nation, and however much he may resent and remonstrate, while humanity at large stands firm, he will only be reckoned an amiable lunatic, who, perhaps, some may humour from interest or compassion.

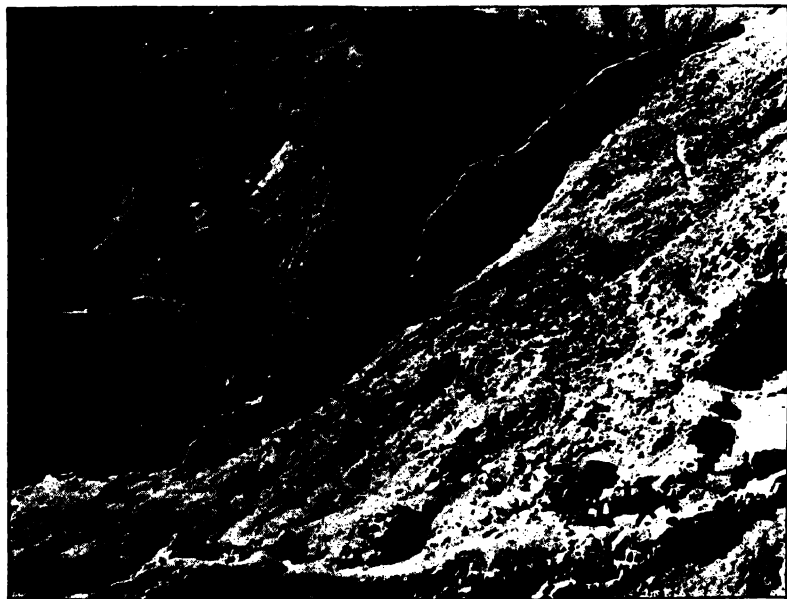
It is very horrible and painful, this disregard in Persia for even common kindness to a dumb animal, and the most callous of travellers must sometimes shudder at what he sees.

I noted down some of the methods employed by mule-drivers to get their caravans to the end of their marches,—it is altogether a brutal business.

There are various ways in which a reluctant mule can be incited to drag his weary limbs and heavy load the faster up a kotal or across a desert. They are generally varieties of sticks, kicks, and pricks; but the most popular and seemingly the most effective expedient would seem to be the following:—The muleteer takes a stout packing-needle, attached to a piece of string to avoid loss *en route*, and searches for a sore on the animal. This will not prove difficult to discover; but if by any chance the poor beast should actually be free from such, or one should not exist in a convenient spot, he makes one. Then, on signs of the mule flagging, he inserts the needle sharply at the



MY HOST AND HIS WIVES—AT ALIABAD IN THE ELBURZ MOUNTAINS.



CLIMBING A KOTAL.

appropriate spot ;—this has the double effect of urging the animal on and keeping the place in excellent condition for further use. Should a mule absolutely collapse or slip down under its load on a more than usually precipitous or ice-clad kotal, the driver pulls out the large clasp-knife which every muleteer possesses, and gives the animal some sharp digs on the shoulder. Should this fail, he unloads the pack and repeats the process. If even this is unavailing, the troublesome beast must be left to die, and its load distributed among its more fortunate, or possibly more unfortunate, companions.

It is not in accordance with custom to kill a beast which is unfit for further work ; it must be just abandoned to its fate. A more than usually kindly mule-driver will sometimes put a handful of hay before it, that it may die, as he likes to imagine, in slightly greater comfort.

The Persian is not above making some profit out of the distress of a dumb animal, and the traveller must beware of letting his compassion lead him to finish off some poor beast he sees starving by the wayside. It is quite possible that from somewhere in the locality there will suddenly appear a man who will assert that he is the owner of the beast. It is hard to prove him wrong, and when he goes on to complain that you have destroyed a valuable piece of his property, and to claim substantial compensation, it is quite probable that compensation will have to be paid. In some cases, however, the deed would seem almost worth the price.

As I have said, little can be done by the individual in the cause of humanity ; the traveller who protests will be thought mad, and will serve the poor mules little ; but if every traveller were to make up

his mind to do his small best to show the disgust and abhorrence he feels, and to make the Persian understand that the white races, whom, if they do not love, they at all events respect, possess a code of morality in which cruelty is considered unworthy of a man, then possibly in time something might be accomplished towards a better state of things.

The kotals are four in number : The Kotal-i-Mallu, —the Accursed Pass ; the Kotal-i-Kumarij ; the Kotal-i-Dokhter,—the Pass of the Daughter ; and the Kotal-i-Pir-i-Zan,—the Pass of the Old Woman. No one will quarrel with the name of the first, and the 'Old Woman's' Pass is an appropriate designation, as Lord Curzon observes, for so 'peculiarly uninviting, time-worn, and repulsive' a place. Kumarij is the name of a place, and its pass is naturally named after it. But when we come to the 'Pass of the Daughter,' which is the worst of all, a protest must be entered, and the only suggestion as to an explanation of a title apparently so singularly inapposite is that the coyest young woman could not resent advances with greater firmness than this unfriendly pass.

The four kotals are ascended by the ordinary traveller on different days ; but a detailed description of each would be tedious. Suffice it to say that they all bear a striking resemblance to each other as regards unpleasant difficulty, and the last is invariably the least obnoxious whichever way the traveller may be going.

To return to my little caravan, just started on the beginning of the first or 'accursed' pass, the first ascent was a comparatively innocent slope of about 30 degrees, where my 'pony' only fell down once. Then it was up and down over rocks and stones, among rugged ranges, looking as if they had been cleft with some gigantic knife, till, suddenly, round a corner we

came again on my friend, the Daliki River. Alas! there was no time for a much-longed-for bathe in this magnificent spot; a drink of what the imaginative Pierre Loti calls *cette rivière empoisonnée* had to suffice, and we passed on.

The pass was now upon us with all its 'accursed'-ness, and to my inexperienced mind it seemed to deserve some more definitely vituperative epithet. The path up which the mules literally climbed wound among rocks which were frequently so large and so closely placed that the packs had frequently much ado to get past at all.

In a little there came into sight an imposing zigzag of masonry running up a peculiarly precipitous place;—actually a man-made road. But, characteristic of things Persian, this magnificence is all show, for the nature of this road prohibits traffic thereon, it being composed of large and slippery cobble-stones bounded by walls about 3 feet high. Any effort to keep to this unfortunately useless piece of engineering would have ended in disaster for the mules, so they corkscrewed painfully up outside the grand concern, which Saif and I ascended in solitary state.

At last, at last, the summit was reached, and we came out on a great level plain, half-way across which appeared the welcome sight of the night's caravanserai at the village of Khonar-takhteh. Dripping with perspiration, we halted at the top to look out over the stretched-out world below us, and our little caravan came together for a few moments' rest. There was a rain-water reservoir, a cool, echoing, cellar-like place, and while I and the Afghan drank in the view and thanked heaven for the flat earth with a fervency which only those who have experienced the sensation of ascending a kotal can realize, our retinue refreshed

themselves by going down the flight of steps to the dark, refreshing-looking water under the arched roof, and with many indescribable noises lapping it up in all imaginable ways.

The little plain we were on was the flat part of the first 'step' up to Persia proper. The country here is bare, but, as usual, the fault lies, not with nature, but with man, for there is a stream which, running through the village, is put to no manner of use, but flows aimlessly away across the plain.

The village itself is a picturesque and not more than usually filthy little place, set among groves of date-palms, from which rises a tomb,—that of a brother of the Imam Reza—at least, so say the Mullas, to whose obvious interest it is that Imams should have as large families as possible, and that they should be buried in as many places apiece as the credulity of the Persian will allow.

Next day came another kotal, that of Kumarij. Just as we approached this second obstacle there appeared by the side of the road countless small heaps of stones, somewhat such as are seen by an English road in course of repair. Now, no one who had the slightest acquaintance with Persia would ever imagine that the inhabitants would ever repair, or, indeed, even create, a road, and, moreover, the size of the stones was so great as to banish any idea that they were to be put to such a use. So I inquired of Meshed-i-Kamba, the strapping six-foot giant who was my under-muleteer, what these little heaps meant. I found they were cairns formed by the pilgrims who travel to the various holy shrines, a visit to which constitutes a step up the ladder to the Mahometan heaven, and allows the pilgrim to prefix to his name the coveted title of 'Meshed-i,' 'Hajji,' etc., as the case

may be. Each man contributes his small offering of a stone to some heap which appeals to his imagination, and so there rise along the pilgrim routes these little monuments to the nameless passers-by.

The scene during the ascent of the Kumarij kotal was magnificent. On one side of a huge chasm the path wound tortuously upward; the other was a sheer precipice, down which Nature in a fantastic mood had fashioned vertical strata-seams straight down the face of the rock. Behind, there grew an ever-widening prospect of mountain-land, splendid in its desolate bleakness. Half-way up there came a tiny spring, gently oozing out of the rock wall, and just enough to provide the thirsty traveller with a draught of the coldest water.

Climbing with renewed energy to the top, we came upon the guard-house of the Kashgai mountain guard, where swarthy men armed with rifles came out to us with tiny glass vases of tea. The Persian always drinks his tea without milk, but he makes up for it by nearly half filling his cup with sugar, which makes the compound seem like some flavoured syrup rather than the beverage we know in England.

When first, on such an occasion as I have described, the traveller meets a polite Persian offering him a cup of tea, he will be surprised, and probably overcome with gratitude, at this unsolicited attention. But let him beware; it is not gratitude that the Persian wants, but money. Such politenesses are strict business, and it is as well to recognize as early as possible that, unless under exceptional conditions, the principle in Persia is 'Give nothing for nothing, and as little as possible for as much as you can get.' Politeness, it is only fair to say, is indeed *par excellence* a Persian virtue, and when it costs the giver nothing, he expects

nothing in return. If, however, it entails some material sacrifice, some material recompense is necessary, and the Persian is clever enough to have learnt that one cup of tea offered with an airy disregard of sordid bargaining is worth two disposed of on commercial principles. He has learnt the lesson that if you throw your bread upon the waters, it frequently comes back ham sandwiches ; indeed, he expects it to do so. It is hardly too much to say that courtesy in some instances may be regarded as quite a marketable commodity in Persia, a sort of tax on the usual price of things. With practice, however, it is possible to repay the Persian in his own coin. He prefers money, but if you repay courtesy with courtesy he cannot grumble. Thus, one cup of tea, plus a polite wish that Allah will take care of your health, may be repaid either by the price of two cups of tea, or the price of one cup of tea plus a flowery speech as to the goodness of the tea-giver. A small orange which is sour and uneatable, handed to you, as is the Persian custom, with both hands, and accompanied by remarks as to your nobility, may either be purchased at the extravagant price of a penny, or, since it probably cost the giver nothing ; may simply be acknowledged by a wish that the Lord will eternally grant the orange-grower protection. The unskilled wayfarer had very much better go cautiously, at all events until he has learnt the different way in which gratitude, politeness, and such virtues are looked upon in Persia, and the precise value they possess. Otherwise he will find himself drinking tea and eating sour oranges until he becomes extremely unwell, and distributing unnecessary rewards with a prodigality which, apart from its proving a serious matter to himself, spoils the market for those who come after him. Let him not be afraid ; the Persian will not be offended

at his refusing what appears to be a gratuitous kindness. The 'gratuitous' kindness is a speculation, and it has not come off. That is all.

So I smiled politely at the little vase of tea, and said : 'Your goodness is too great' (*Marhmat-i-Shuma ziyad*); whereupon the soldier who offered it smiled back and returned : 'God give you protection' (*Khuda Hafiz*).

One thing is certain ; however much the traveller may be swindled by the cunning of the Persian, he must be charmed by their courtesy, and the 'fleecing' operation loses much of its unpleasantness if it is conducted in so delightful a manner.

Just over the top of the pass, Kumarij itself came into view from behind a bluff ;—a mass of little mud huts, a couple of stone buildings, and a sprinkling of date-palms. Here is the usual 'stage,' but I had determined to push on to-day as far as I could, for to-morrow I had made up my mind to visit Shahpur, the first of the great relics of the past which it was to be my fortune to see during my travels.

Lord Curzon advises the traveller, on his way from the Gulf, who wishes to spend a day among these ruins to take his night's rest at Kumarij, 'starting from there very early in the morning in order to have a long day at Shahpur, where there is no accommodation, and to get at nightfall to Kazerun.' To my mind the day would be altogether too short for this plan, and would allow of so little time at the ruins and entail so late an arrival at Kazerun that the whole business would be unsatisfactory. When I was on the spot myself I made a note of how best it seemed to me a visit to the ancient city might be arranged, and I will quote here what I wrote then : 'Press on from Kumarij over the long plain through the abominable

stony pass of Tang-i-Turkan, down a sloping gorge strewn with rocks, boulders, pebbles, every variety of geological impediment, into the plain of Kazerun. There, where the road leads round to the east, you will see below you, just as you pass a small useless-looking round tower, a river running through the valley beneath. Behind the hill you have just passed is a picturesque little village set in a green oasis. There you can get a chicken—but I got no eggs—and if you descend straight down to the river below, and by it pitch a camp, you will be at no loss for water. You will, moreover, be near enough to the aforesaid hamlet to obtain easily supplies, and far enough away to avoid being bothered by its inhabitants. In my tent, pitched close beside the running water, I am writing these words, and, starting hence early, I propose to-morrow to visit the ruins, which should only be about six miles distant. I shall send my luggage straight on to Kazerun, about twelve miles off, where I hope to rejoin my caravan at nightfall.'

Should the traveller have no means of camping, he would surely obtain accommodation—of a kind—in the little village not far from my camping-ground.

I used to find that the time from my arrival after a march until (sometimes late at night) a meal was ready was usefully employed in jotting down the day's doings in my diary, and perhaps writing a letter in the hope that some day soon it might be posted. The only way to keep a journal on such a pilgrimage is to put down everything and thin out afterwards; and so great and small, insignificant and important, all went down as far as I could set it down. Even culinary matters were not neglected, as will be seen by the following extract:—

'By the way, here is a good way of using up rice

over from curry by making rice-cakes. Take enough rice (already boiled, of course) to make a couple of round cakes 4 inches in diameter and $\frac{1}{2}$ inch thick. Take also an egg and beat it up. Then mix lightly, and if the rice does not cling, add more egg till it does. Butter a frying-pan, and pour the rice out of whatever it is in into the pan in two round, flat heaps—do not *mould* it. Then let it fry till you can turn the cakes with a knife, which do, and leave till they are brown and tasty. I am afraid the style of my recipe is not up to *Household Magazine* form; still, it may be explicit enough to make rice-cakes from, which is, after all, its object.

‘My housekeeping is a most distributed affair—every one offers suggestions or helps, including Stumps, who I have reason to believe cleans the plates. . . .

‘I wish my chicken, now dead and, I hope, nearly cooked, would make its appearance; I want to get to bed—as a last resource to get warm. Ah! here it is.’

CHAPTER V

A VISIT TO THE PAST

ΤΟΠΡΟCΩΠΟΝΤΟΥΤΟΜΑCΔΑCΝΟΥΘΕΟΥ
[Σ]ΑΠΩΡΟΥΒΑCΙΑΕΩCΒΑCΙΑΕΩΝ[ΑΡΙΑ]ΝΩΝ
ΚΑΙΑΝΑΡΙΑΝΩΝΕΚΓΕΝΟΥCΘΕΩ[ΝΕΚΓΟΝΟΥ]
ΜΑC[ΔΑ]CΝΟΥΘΕΟΥΑΡΤΑΚΑΡCΥ[ΡΒΑCΙΑΕΩC]
ΒΑCΙΑΕΩΝΑΡΙΑΝΩΝΕΚΓΕΝΟ[ΥCΘΕΩΝ]
ΕΚΓΟΝΟΥΘΕΟΥΠΑΠΑΚΟΥΒΑCΙΑ[ΕΩC].

‘This is the image of the Ormuzd-worshipper, the god, Shahpur, King of Kings, Arian and non-Arian, of the race of the gods, son of the Ormuzd-worshipper, the god, Artakarsur,* King of Kings Arian, of the race of the gods, the offspring of the god Papak the King.’

Copy and translation of the inscription in Pehlevi and Greek, on the breast of Shahpur's horse in the rock picture at Naksh-i-Rejeb.

THE King who gave his name to the ancient city which I was to visit was a mighty man. In his own day he was more—he was a mighty god. His statue, which now lies prone at the mouth of the great cave high up in the cliff behind the ruined city, was once worshipped by the Persian people. The inscriptions which stare out from their panels in the rocky sides of the gorge speak, not of a man, but of a deity. Indeed, there was more excuse for a belief in the divinity of Kings in those days of unbridled autocracies than in these of representative governments and limited monarchs. After all, it was only a small step down

* Ardeshir.

from the Olympian deities of Greece to the god Shahpur. There was no little resemblance between them — in their tremendous powers, their human passions, their awe-inspiring deeds.

This Shahpur, indeed, was no unworthy rival of an ancient deity, and it is not incongruous, when his works are known, to see him figuring side by side and on equal terms with Jupiter in the rock pictures on the cliffs which overshadow the city which he founded, and vaunting himself in the language of a god in the inscriptions which record the incidents those rock pictures represent. Second of the great Sassanian race of Kings, Shahpur made the middle of the third century after Christ a period which rivalled in splendour the era of the mighty Achæmenian monarchs, eight centuries before. Resolute, resourceful, a warrior and a statesman, letting no opposition and few scruples stand in the way of the accomplishment of his purpose, he not only developed his empire by conquests abroad, but established it more firmly by reforms at home. He had the fortune to see a Roman army and a Roman Emperor surrender to his forces, and he had the satisfaction of knowing that by his initiative his country's material prosperity increased step by step with its fame.

It is scarcely to be wondered at that such a King wished to leave some indelible record of his deeds for the benefit of future generations. Shahpur took care that he did so. Scattered up and down the country he has left memorials that have long withstood, and will long withstand, the touch of time.

He founded stately cities, ruined now, but in their decay almost more majestic than they could have been in their prime. He chose, too, to depict the scenes of his conquests, and the pictures still stand for us to see.

It was not paper or paint that he trusted to tell posterity of his great deeds. With magnificent inspiration he chose as his medium the living rock. At Naksh-i-Rustam and, above all, at Shahpur, his own city, these pictures still tell the tale of a Persian King triumphant over a Roman Emperor. The ruined cities are not less impressive than other such monuments of the past; but it is these deep-hewn illustrations of a bygone page of history that most keenly impress the senses and appeal to the imagination. . . .

A wild picture of Nature's majesty and uncouth human art strikes the eye at the approach to the city of Shahpur. From up the gorge dashes between banks thick with undergrowth and stunted trees a beautiful torrent of water leaping and sparkling in the sunlight. There by the side of the stream stand out in the morning sunlight the old rock pictures;—Valerian trampled underfoot by the Persian monarch;—the captives with their look of infinite pathetic resignation, marvellously portrayed in the time-worn stone;—Ormuzd and Narses on their chargers, meeting with set lips and outstretched hands, all beneath towering cliffs of rugged grandeur.

What of the ancient city itself? Stones, white stones, acres upon acres of stones in irregular lines, squares, oblongs—only stones. That is all. Here is a half-dilapidated wall; there what might have been a cellar; but everywhere—stones, level with the ground. This is the royal city, the city of the king-god. The goats climb among its ruins, weeds fill the crannies of what walls remain, bushes people the courts where once feasted the retinues of Kings. Right and left above the gorge, looking over the white stone fields, stand the mouldering ruins of two sentinel forts—the Towers of the Son and Daughter. Beneath,



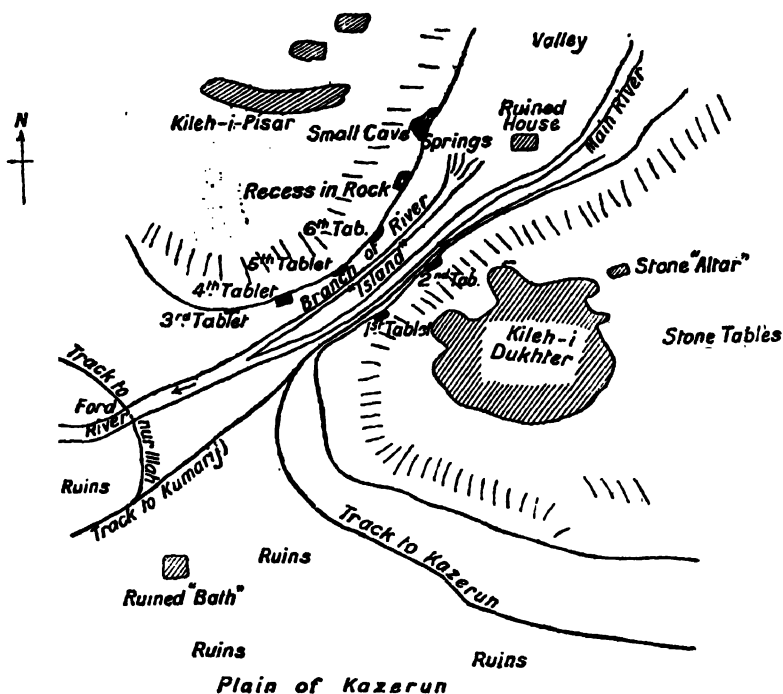
THE STATUE IN THE GREAT CAVE AT SHAHPUR.



ORMUZD AND NARSES—SHAHPUR.

ever gazing upon the sparkling stream as they gazed when it sparkled before the eyes of the Princes and people of old, stand out the rigid stone features of those giant Kings and captives.

Somehow it is very sad, these graven survivors of greater days staring out through times of desolation and decay ; staring out, still, on a degenerate people,



ROUGH MAP OF SHAHPUR.

a ruined city, a fallen nation ; doomed to stare on, whatever may come. The irony, too, how pathetic !—that proud King trampling underfoot the Emperor of the great Roman world, and dumbly watching the ruins of his former glory growing ever more desolate, the sons of his great people always descending the scale of mankind, his pomp and power growing perpetually more remote and more unreal.

The city is situated in the plain of Kazerun, close under the range of mountains which borders it on the north-east side. Just behind, the hills are cleft by the great ravine, down which runs the Shahpur River, and on whose walls are engraved the six rock pictures. The city stretches over more than a square mile of ground, and was evidently surrounded by moats on the south-west and south-east. The north-east side runs close up to the hill upon which the Tower of the Daughter (*Kileh-i-Dokhter*) was built, and the north-west extremity is bounded irregularly by the river.

The ravine behind leads through into a little plain lying like a waterless lake, surrounded by great mountains. On the side of one of these mountains, high up, there is a small black dot. That is the entrance to the cave of Shahpur, at the mouth of which lies prostrate the great statue of the King.

It was nine o'clock when I arrived at the ruins, after an hour and a half's ride over the plain which lay between them and my camp—we could not find a guide, or perhaps the journey might have been a shorter one. After passing into the entrance of the gorge, from which the four northern pictures were plainly visible, we suddenly came upon the two southern ones, those of Shahpur triumphant over Valerian and of Shahpur, Valerian, and Cyriadis with the royal body-guard.

The hand of time, aided by the hand of man in the shape of the ruthless Mahometan invader, who in the eighth century overran the land and desecrated and despoiled all he encountered, has sadly mutilated the great Persian works of art which have been left to us from early days. With all their savage iconoclasm, however, neither time nor the Mahometans have been

able to rob the pictures at Shahpur of their magnificence, their beauty, and, in some cases, their pathos.

In the picture which shows the Persian King triumphant over the Roman Emperor Valerian, the figure of the suppliant Roman kneeling before the horse of the conquering Persian still conveys with its outstretched arm the whole idea of a passionate appeal for mercy. Over against it on the other side of the stream, the Captives, despite the brutal treatment which has been accorded them by the aqueduct which a later age has run straight through the centre of the picture, still preserve their atmosphere of plaintive submission. The processions in the triumphal investiture of Cyriadis of Antioch are redolent of pomp and power. Where Narses is represented in the act of receiving the cydaris or royal emblem from Ormuzd, the god of the ancient Persians, the faces of both, with their strong features and compressed lips, still bespeak a sacred majesty. Even the last of the six tablets, half obscured, as it is, by a bushy, dark green tree, still conveys a living idea, with its crowd of Persian nobles, and, above, King Chosroes himself and his Court.

It did not take me long to make up my mind that in the few hours that were at my disposal justice could not be done to Shahpur. I therefore determined to come back from Kazerun and camp among the ruins for two or three days. To-day I commenced by fording the stream, which divides itself into two channels round a long islet straight opposite the sculptures on the north wall of the rock. This islet forms the best position from which to take photographs of the rock tablets, and I spent some little time obtaining what turned out to be very satisfactory pictures. Down each side of the gorge runs an old

aqueduct carved out of the rock. These aqueducts are evidently of a much later date than the rock pictures themselves, and it is that on the north side which so cruelly defaces one of the sculptures. It is big enough for a man to crawl through where it burrows into the rock, and, making my way on my hands and knees, I followed it beyond the pictures, until I eventually came out into the open again, and met a hill tribesman, who said he could show me where the great cave was. There was no time to-day, so I told him to return in two days.

Next I climbed the north wall of the Kileh-i-Dokhter, scrambling up the steep slope, with its massive walls ten and more feet thick, till I attained the summit and a magnificent view.

At noon, time would allow of no longer delay, and we had to set off for Kazerun, about fifteen miles distant to the south-east. The sun had set, and the night was closing in before, following the telegraph wires (a sure way, it may not be superfluous to remark, of reaching the telegraph rest-house), we came to our destination.

Thus we left for the present the wild valley with its walls of scarred, barren hills merging into the dusk, and entered the little city, which rose in islets of house-tops and palm-trees out of the misty blue sea of its own smoke, looking in the half-light like some phantom mirage.

Two days later I found myself back at Shahpur, and pitched my camp by a ruined building just through the mouth of the gorge and in the opening of the little lake-like valley beyond. This was the day on which I had decided to visit Shahpur's cave in the mountains. Of course my guide was not there; it would have been against Persian principles if he had

been. This, however, was not going to deter me from my project, and at nine o'clock Saif, my muleteer, a pony laden with various accessories, and I myself sallied forth.

South-eastwards we plodded along the valley, till, after going something over a mile, high above us and slightly in front, there appeared a dark mouth-shaped opening in the rock. Close on our left under the mountain were the black tents of some Iliats, and hoping to find the faithless Jowal—our errant guide—we made for this. No, he was not there, but they knew of him. While the others waited for him to be brought, Saif and I went on a wild-goose chase.

Looking up the face of the cliff from below, we had seen a panel-like piece of rock which seemed, from where we were, strangely like another rock picture. Field-glasses did not aid us to decide what it was, and so we set out to climb up and discover for ourselves. After 700 feet of the most atrocious scrambling, we found it was nothing more than an effort of Nature, and wiping our perspiring brows, we pretended that we were well rewarded for our climb by the magnificent view.

In front and far below ran the river, and beyond was a huge green amphitheatre of verdant land dotted with little trees sloping gently up to the bleak surrounding semicircle of hills behind. To the south-east—that is, at the opposite end of the gorge to that in which lay my little camp—there was an abrupt break, and through this we could see a plain beyond with still the same river wandering through it. Beyond that, again, rose still more mighty hills, backed by one round-topped giant of many thousand feet, on whose crest glistened a belt of snow. Above us the cliffs rose sheer a thousand feet, scarred and pitted with

caves, cut by break-neck torrent courses, and stretching away past our cave, a mile away, till they hung sheer over the further gorge.

In Persia a valuable maxim is that if you ever wish to finish anything you must begin early, and now time was precious; so as soon as our breath was regained, we had to be off. We had the choice either of scrambling back the way we had come, walking along the valley and again ascending the cliffs to the cave, or of picking a difficult and arduous way straight along the side of the mountain to the little black opening that was our destination. We chose the latter course, and it need hardly be said we afterwards cursed ourselves for doing so. Of two bad things, the one chosen invariably seems the worst, and until the time, situated, alas! somewhere between the Greek kalends and the millennium, when it will be possible to try both of two alternatives and compare the results, this unfortunate state of things will have to continue.

We had at all events the benefit of an exciting, if somewhat unpleasant, experience during our climb. The way we chose lay close under absolutely precipitous cliffs, and as we were crossing a moraine above which the jagged line of rock was broken by a dry watercourse, suddenly there came a swiftly swelling, thundering noise from aloft, a pause, and then between us there plunged a huge stone, which pitched among the scattered stones with a crash, and dashed headlong down the slope beneath. Just as I looked up, down came another boulder, to be shattered on the rocks behind us. I did not wait to further investigate what was happening, but, as fast as was possible over such abominable ground, scrambled, followed by Saif, to a place where the overhanging cliffs sheltered us from

farther danger. As we made our way thither, rock after rock came hurtling down, till the valley echoed with the roar. Once we were in safety, I looked up, trying to ascertain what it all meant. There was nothing to be seen, and Saif, when a partial recovery of his breath made it possible, gasped : ' This, sir, is some terrible cataclasm of Nature.' (Saif never used a short word when a long one would do, and his inventive genius always came to the rescue if by any chance his memory was deficient. I remember once I found him putting a blanket over my horse when it seemed to be entirely unnecessary to do so. ' Saif,' I said, ' why put the blanket on the pony?' ' Sir,' he said solemnly, ' your horse is extremely perspired.' I have entered the word in my dictionary.)

Saif's 'cataclasm' did not seem to be a plausible or sufficient reason for what had occurred, and, indeed, was still occurring, so, pulling out a pistol which I always had on me, and which I knew carried a considerable distance, I fired a shot at the top of the precipice whence the avalanches of rock had come. I fancy I was right, and that, in spite of Saif's protest that 'no man would be possible to hurl such terrific things,' human agency had at all events started them in their course, for after my little warning the 'cataclasms' ceased.

Speaking generally, the dangers of Persia are largely a matter of the imagination and of the past. Time was when the country was infested with savage hordes, and by no means destitute of dangerous beasts ; but to-day the savage hordes have dwindled to an occasional robber, or a still more occasional band of raiders, and the sportsman will complain rather of the scarcity than of the profusion of big game. Even in Tavernier's day the place had become fairly free from dangers of this latter

kind. 'Some parts of Persia,' he says, 'are perplex'd also with wild beafts, as Lyons, Bears, and Leopards, but there are but very few ; nor have we heard that ever they did any great mischief.' To-day the lion is a thing of the past, and the bear and the leopard, unless he is in a tight corner, will not generally attack a man if the man does not first provoke him. There are stories even to-day of old women who have been snatched from the middle of a caravan by some marauding lion, but I fancy that if an old woman vanishes, the Persian imagination is by no means unequal to providing a dramatic reason for her disappearance, and though lions are still said to live, and certainly do so, in the fertile Persian mind, it is a suspicious fact that they are never seen dead.

As regards the danger from human sources, I never found that the Persians were in any way ready to show themselves actively hostile to a foreigner. They do not love the Englishman, looking upon him, as they do, as a somewhat offensive intruder, whose presence augurs them no good ; but, as I have said, they usually respect his powers, both physical and mental. They are, however, far more like Europeans than are other Eastern nations, such as, for instance, the Hindoos, and their sturdy independence and sporting spirit make them men who can, if they like, be excellent friends or formidable foes. The sporting instinct, though scarcely on quite the same plan as an Englishman's, is very captivating. It is the predominant trait in the Persian character, and sometimes leads him into difficulties. To a man with a rifle the small white insulators on the telegraph-poles must always offer a most tempting mark, and for a long time the Persian was utterly unable to resist the temptation to try his skill upon them. But this sport is not good

for telegraph-wires, and after a time it had to be discontinued. It was naturally impossible to take measures against every individual Persian ragamuffin who, in the comfortable solitude of the desert, chose to have a little practice in marksmanship, and so the only way was to make the chief men of the district responsible. This is a most efficient way of appealing to the Persian sense of law and order, and after a time the little white insulators were left in peace.

It is the sporting instinct more than any actual dislike to the traveller that leads the shepherd, as he 'homeward plods his weary way,' inspired by the sight of a small white tent in the distance, to loose off a shot thereat, as he has before now done when I have been inside it. In fact, our dear Persian child-man is a very good fellow if he is taken in the right way, and in few cases will he attempt to do the traveller any actual bodily injury. It is well, however, to travel pretty well armed. The Persian rifles cannot compete with modern arms, and the sight of a good weapon inspires a remarkable amount of respect for the owner.

If the Persian is fairly scrupulous as regards persons, he is no respecter of things. His views on property would be received with marked disapproval in this country, his maxim being that 'God helps those who help themselves,' which precept he follows out by helping himself to anything he can lay his hands on.

At Shahpur we had a little experience of this, for one morning my servant, Kishna, came to me with a look of horror and penitence, which in an Indian servant invariably betokens that something has gone wrong. 'Sahib,' he said, 'there has been a robber.' Visions of rifles stolen, of my little store of money gone, flashed through my mind. But it was not so bad as all that. The man had apparently entered the

servants' tent while they were there asleep, and taken at random all that he could find and dispose of. The net 'swag,' therefore, was found to consist of all the kitchen utensils, some eggs, and a pair of putties. Not a robbery on a very large scale! The kitchen utensils, indeed, were a very serious matter, and raised a grave problem; but our robber was a gentlemanly fellow. Having no possible use for kitchen utensils, when he discovered what they were, he considerately put them by the river, where they were discovered the morning after.

At the beginning of this digression I left Saif and myself perspiring under a precipice near the cave of Shahpur. We plodded on, and it was not long before we at last found ourselves just beneath the cave, whence we attracted the attention of the muleteer and the Iliats—mere specks below. In an hour they were with us, and we were ready to effect the last precipitous ascent to the cave itself. Though this is a steep climb of about 25 feet up the sheer face of the rock, with a little agility it is easy to scramble to the top by means of the cracks worn in the stone. Once there, the entrance of the cave gapes straight ahead. I walked up a rough slope, and there, about 50 yards down the incline which descended into the gloom of the great caverns, lay before me a huge uncouth monster, torn from off the rough stand where still remained his sandalled feet. The body of the giant Shahpur lay miserably abject, the noseless face turned upwards, the head sunk in the soft earth, its luxuriant curls buried; his body aslant; his legs a few feet higher than his head, and resting on their ancient throne. The 20-foot body was clad in a kind of tunic, crossed with two sashes, from one of which, at his left side, once hung his sword; an armless

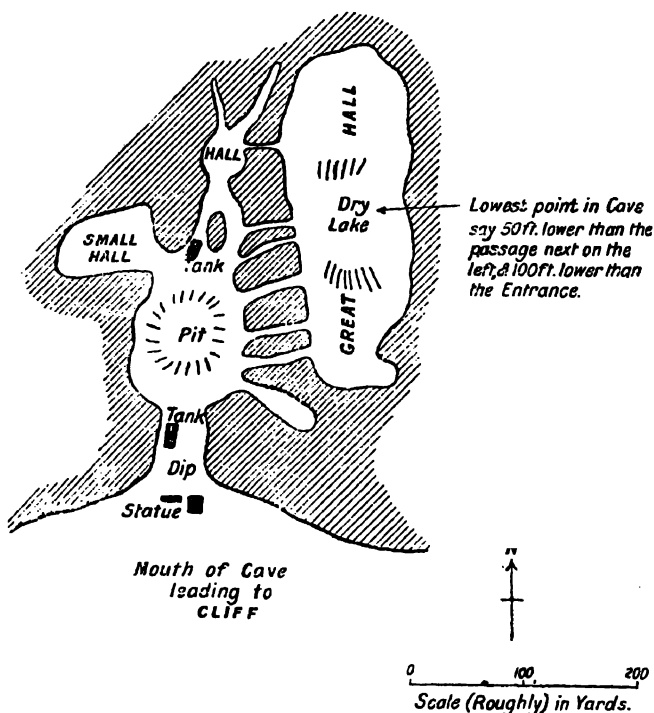
hand rested on his right hip, while above, a broken shoulder protruded horribly. The left arm was broken off above the wrist; its hand, no doubt, once rested upon the hilt of the sword.

Thus, with mutilated features and fragments of limbs, lay Shahpur—the Ormuzd-worshipper, the god, Shahpur, King of Kings, Arian and non-Arian, of the race of the gods, son of the Ormuzd-worshipper, the god, Artakarsur, King of Kings.

There was an impressive pathos about this great grotesque image, once bowed down to and worshipped as a god, now lying dishonoured in its lonely cave above the ruins of a dead city. The weird solemnity was heightened by the surroundings. The image was set in the centre of the lofty sloping hall which formed the mouth of the cave; in front shone the gap of blue sky; behind, yawned the desolate gloom; all around lay the relics of a dead civilization—it was a scene to see by twilight in the falling dusk, with the great King looking like a white giant against the inky depths behind, and the sky-patch fading from crimson to grey. Then it would not be hard to imagine the dead people of the strange old-world city stealing from the uncanny, musty nooks within to do reverence to Shahpur. The natives fear this place; they will not go there alone, and refuse altogether to enter the black recesses of the cave. Nor is it hard to understand their feelings, for well might this chasm with its ruined tanks, huge, damp, tomb-like halls, and long, evil-smelling passages, be the abode of ghosts, as it is of bats and strange owlish birds.

The men I was with, *tufangchis* and Iliats, were, in fact, in a deadly terror of the cave, the dark, and everything else. There were ghosts, they protested, and when I did not appear to set much store by ghosts,

they told tales of leopards to dissuade me from my purpose of exploring the place. Leopards were more likely than ghosts, but neither seemed sufficiently probable to keep me from going in, so I laughed at their fears and went on. After some murmuring, they consented to follow me, and when, in the centre of the great subterranean hall which I found within, I fired off a flashlight in order to obtain a photograph,



THE CAVE AT SHAHPUR.

they recovered their spirits to quite a remarkable extent;—but they were very glad to get out.

As Lord Curzon remarks that the cave has never been properly explored, and as I can vouch for the fact that I went into every penetrable corner, it may be worth while giving in full the description I wrote at the time.

‘Passing the statue, at about 100 yards from the entrance there is a small depression, on the far side of which is situated an old tank. Fifty yards further on gapes a huge pit, from whose slopes there branch numerous dark passages. The only one on the left hand leads immediately into a circular hall, apparently untouched by man, about 50 yards in diameter. The next, immediately ahead, begins as a broad passage, in which are the remains of another and smaller ruined tank, behind which the passage branches, only to reunite after a few yards and lead into a small hall, at the far end of which two narrow passages run a short distance into the rock, that to the left coming to a stop rather sooner than the one on the right. All the way along the right-hand side of the great pit there branch off passages which lead into a huge, lofty hall, sloping steeply down to a depression which must some time have been an underground lake. This hall, after descending precipitously for about 50 yards, rises again steeply, and, continuing for some distance, ends in various short ramifications. To explore this part needs much scrambling over greasy ground, and involves, generally, several slips and falls. The great hall must, from end to end, be 300 or 400 yards in length, and in places fully 100 feet high. The last or right-hand passage from the pit, that nearest the entrance, does not lead into the hall, but, running uphill for about 100 yards, ends in a chamber whose roof is blackened, apparently by smoke or some chemical agency, and in the centre of which is a large irregular stone. Throughout the cave the formation is stalactite, and on the far slope of the great hall rise two or three pillars thus constructed by Nature.

‘The soil is singularly soft and loose notwithstanding its dampness, and does not make mud. It is dotted

in places with mushroom-like stone 'flowers,' having round white centres fringed with frosty irregularities. There are in the bottom of the dry, subterranean lake fragments of coarse pottery, which also are found up the near slope, which seems to partake of the nature of a rubbish-heap. Bones lie about, and in places are curious remains of what appears to be some extremely light burnt substance.

'The cave would seem to have been used as a place of worship, and, I should say, possibly as a place of interment or cremation. Probably it was the home of a few priests, but beyond this does not appear to have felt the touch of man. The galleries are all natural, and there are no signs of human work save the statue at the entrance and the two tanks, which were presumably used for ceremonial ablutions or possibly for washing the dead. There were no evidences of recent exploration save a couple of names (one "Hyde, 1821") cut on the statue. I made a rough map of the cave, and I think I explored every part of it; the 'ramifications' spoken of by Lord Curzon did not, I am afraid, repay the trouble of scrambling along them.'

With a curious feeling of depression I came out, as it were from a gloomy vault into the fresh outside air again. It was sunset, and the dark was rapidly closing in;—there was no time to be lost in making our descent to the plain. We each took our own path, and when I got to the bottom I found myself alone. By this time night was close at hand, and I set off towards the distant camp, hoping to get, at all events, in sight of the camp-fire before it was quite dark. Alas! I had no such luck. Before I had turned the bluffs between myself and my little encampment, the night had fallen like a velvet curtain. There is nothing afflicts a man with such a sense of impotence as being

alone in a strange place in absolute darkness. The brain becomes bewildered, and the simplest problems seem blankly impossible of solution. I blundered and fell about among ruins and little ridges until at last I felt, with a sort of helpless annoyance, that I was actually lost not a mile from home. The blackness had a kind of impenetrable solidity ; I felt my way a foot at a time, until at last I fell into a river. This pleased me, because now, I imagined, I had only to follow the river and I should reach camp. I endeavoured to keep by the stream ; but the hills closed in, masses of bushes suddenly appeared, and soon further progress was impossible. Shahpur has an unenviable reputation for its robbers, and hitherto I had not shouted, because I did not know what species of person my shouts would bring to me. But it now appeared impossible for me to find my way home unguided, so I shouted, hoping that the people whose attention I might attract would not be two extremely ruffianly-looking men whom I had met just before nightfall, and who had showed a disposition to refuse to let me pass, only being overcome by a show of placid miscomprehension upon my part. I might have made my mind quite easy ; my shouts brought no one at all. Then I sat down and thought. If I could keep within reasonable distance of the river and go in the same direction I was bound to reach camp, so I crawled up the slope on my right until, to my joy, I found a flat piece of ground, along which I stumbled. Just as I was beginning to wonder if I was going in the right direction after all, from behind the black hill (no blacker, indeed, than the night itself) there suddenly came into sight the tiny dot of a fire, flashing on my bewildered brain like a ray of sunshine. All that remained was never to lose sight of that light, and I made a bee-line for it

over every sort of obstacle, reaching it at last after about half an hour. I found that the others also were lost, but they, too, crawled miserably in after a little, quite ready for the substantial meal which the good Kishna had thoughtfully prepared.

During the night there had been sundry strange noises in the darkness, and next morning, as Saif and I were on our way to explore more thoroughly the great Fort of the Daughter which frowned down from above us, we found that the dead body of a donkey, left, as is the Persian custom, casually lying on the path a short distance away, had been eaten by leopards. With a regret that our friends had not completely finished off the remains of the unfortunate beast, we set about our rather arduous climb up to the old ruins.

The fort stands on the extremity of the lower or south-eastern rock wall of the gorge, and is in an advanced stage of decay. Only a few walls, the remains of a few rooms, and two or three buttresses remain, all the rest being merely heaps of stones scattered down the steep slopes. Ascending from the north-west, among the dilapidated remains of walls on that side we found many pieces of enamel pottery—either jars or tiles. It was beautiful work; the colours were still very rich, and ranged from dark blue to dark green, passing all the intermediate stages of light blues, bluish-greens, and light greens. There were also pieces of pure white and a few streaky specimens; some of the enamel was quite transparent. Unfortunately, none of the pieces were of any size, and I collected a haversack full from this slope, the only one, it eventually appeared, on which they are to be found.

Presumably, the royal ladies' apartments were here, the more business-like portion of the fort lying to the

south-east, where are two large and exceedingly massive buttresses, the remains of a strong wall, and a block of masonry, within which there must be rooms to which the entrances are now stopped by the debris of the other walls.

Down the cliff to the north-west run massive ramparts, terminating in ruined towers, while along the south-eastern face must have been carried tiers of fortifications, the ruins of which, interspersed with small, half-dilapidated rooms, cover the slopes on that side.

In our explorations we eventually reached the wall, buttresses, and block of masonry which have been already mentioned. This is the best preserved portion of the fort, but, although in some places the ruins are upwards of 50 feet in thickness, no access can be obtained to the rooms which undoubtedly must exist in the interior. A small depression on the flat, grass-grown top of a part of the buildings seemed to indicate a subsidence of the roof of some chamber beneath, but efforts to penetrate this were useless.

The two buttresses, from the most southerly of which a great mass has become detached and slopes at an imminent angle, are very puzzling from their extreme thickness and the absence of any apparent windows to anything within. There are the remains of what look like the narrow slits typical of castles built in the days of bows and arrows, but they either lead nowhither, or appear to be merely the residue of further architecture which has disappeared.

Rounding in our explorations the foot of this portion of the fort, there appeared still more inexplicable problems.

First, right on the edge of the cliff, was a curious stone altar, the flat top of which had been hollowed

into a kind of 'bath,' just large enough, as I found by trial, to contain the body of a good-sized man. About 4 feet high and 8 feet long, the whole of this had been cut out of the solid rock, and now stood there on the verge of the precipice, a permanent and striking memorial of some custom or ceremony of the past.

Hard by were other relics, which surely, I thought, should have some connexion with this solitary altar. Further up the rapidly ascending cliff to the north-east there were other such graves or 'baths'; but these had not the dignity of a raised altar, being merely hollowed out of the naked rock. In some cases there was at a corner a little hole leading to a cut channel in the stone, obviously for carrying off fluid of some kind. Besides this, there were many slightly raised 'tables,' also fashioned out of the rock itself, and looking like some kind of memorial tablets.

What are these strange works? For what rites or customs were they used? Personally, I think it practically certain that these places were used in some way for the burial rites of the dead. My knowledge of archæology is, unfortunately, not sufficient for me to offer any definite or enlightening opinions on the subject. I can only give facts and offer suggestions in the hope that others with greater knowledge and experience may be able to employ them usefully.

The most important point, and one which affects the whole question intimately, appears to be, How did these people of old dispose of their dead? Round Shahpur there are apparently no remains of tombs or graveyards, and it is unlikely that all the bodies of those who died would have been indiscriminately buried without any indication of the place of burial. This seems to point to the fact that the bodies were not buried at all. Two alternatives remain—exposure

and cremation. The peculiar open graves and the flat stone tables cut in the rock seem equally suited to either way of the disposal of dead bodies. Since, however, the religion of the ancient Persians was fire-worship, and at the time of Shahpur Zoroastrianism, recently revived, was probably enjoying considerable vigour, it appears to me that the more likely suggestion is that the Sassanian Persians burnt their dead, and that these curious graves and tablets were employed in crematory rites. The cave itself may have been used as a religious temple and burning-place, and the tanks there were probably sacred baths. Possibly, indeed, there were lustrations of various kinds to be performed before the dead body was ready for burning, in which case the stone 'baths' and 'channels' by the Fort of the Daughter were probably used for this purpose, while the stone tables were employed for the offices of fire which followed.

While I am talking of the disposal of the dead, I cannot resist telling a little story which was recounted to me by my Persian guide on my journey to the cave. A short way up the valley through which lies the first part of the way there is a smooth recess in a large rock. 'In the old days,' said the Persian, pointing to this, 'men lived for ever.' (Why they were not, therefore, alive now he disdained, with true Persian disregard of sordid detail, to explain.) Apparently, however, while under ordinary circumstances their lives never ended, it was possible to put people to death by force or starvation. 'When a man or woman became very old or helpless,' went on my friend, 'they became a burden upon their families. One of their children, therefore, when their father's or mother's perpetual life began to become tedious and annoying, used to take their parent away and quietly

leave him or her in this cavity in the rock. It happened one day that a young man was taking off his father in a basket in order to dispose of him in this fashion. Having comfortably settled him in a corner of the recess, the young man prepared to depart, but just as he was going, he heard the feeble voice of his old father calling him to stop. 'Well,' said the young Persian, putting his head round the corner, 'what is the matter?' 'Are you not going to take away the basket?' said the old man. 'No,' replied his son, 'it is an old basket, and it will not be wanted.' 'Who knows,' was the reply, 'but that it may come in useful for you one day?' This remark, they say, so struck the son, that, taking up the basket, he carried both it and his old father home again, and in that family the custom from that time was discontinued.' Pity, after all, in other countries besides Persia, is often induced by a reflection on self in other less fortunate circumstances.

From the Fort of the Daughter, there lies spread out before the eye a magnificent view of the Kazerun Valley. Like a map the little winding paths and the watercourses wander through the landscape, while close beneath the great wall stretches away the bleached skeleton of the city of Shahpur in a confused mass of endless white ruins pitted with the black openings of wells.

Only two ruins catch the eye out of all the square mile of dilapidation. One, to the south, seems to be the remains of an old fort; the other, those of a large 'bath' or 'room.' This latter, which I afterwards descended to inspect, is finely constructed of blocks of stone (4 feet by 2 feet by 1 foot), and the north-west wall is still almost entire, though I could not discover Lord Curzon's 'section of an arched window and the



SMALL ROCK "ALTAR" AT SHAHPUR.



THE FORT OF THE DAUGHTER--SHAHPUR.
(Showing the stone "altar" at the edge of the cliff on the right.)

remains of some bull-headed capitals, no doubt an imitation of those at Persepolis, that probably once supported an architrave or roof.' True, on the top of the massive wall are three formless projections, but only by a stretch of the imagination could they be identified as 'bull-headed capitals,' and evidences of a window there are none. What appears most likely is that it once was a 'bath' or a 'room' for summer residence, there being no suspicion of such another wall as that remaining, to face it on the south-east, and it being at all events possible that instead there were steps down to the level of the floor, which is sunk about 20 feet below the ground level. The one wall extant is about 40 feet high, and, towering over the court, now overgrown with the dark green wychelm, has a melancholy and striking grandeur.

The ruined city is everywhere honeycombed with wells, or those series of underground water-passages called *kanats*, usually about 50 feet deep. I dropped my most beloved pipe down one of these wells while measuring it, so the information cost me dear.

Behind the ruined bath there is a broad open space with a mound of ruins in the centre. It is similar to many other such mounds, and it appears probable that each one is the ruins of a house, and, were the mounds excavated, the interiors of rooms would be laid bare. There is now, however, no possibility of getting to them, since they have been closed by the debris, as in the Kileh-i-Dokhter; but, standing on the perfectly flat top of one mound, I was able to trace the square outlines of the old walls, ten feet thick, outside which the ruins sloped to the ground in a grassy incline.

The Kileh-i-Dokhter and the objects which surround it had taken the whole day to examine. My next

day, the last, was devoted to the opposite (north-western) side of the gorge, which, except for its four pictures, contains little that is now of interest.

High aloft, and guarding, with its sister fort straight opposite, the portals of the gorge, stands, or rather stood, for it is nothing more now than a crumbling ruin, the Fort of the Son (*Kileh-i-Pisar*). Far above the Daughter it towers, and, alas! it is in a far more advanced stage of decay, for there only remain a few lines of wall and two ruined towers.

Clambering up the rough rock face, and passing a solitary raised 'tablet' in the rock, we soon came on the ruins of the first line of walls, a mere crumbling mass of stones, strewn with fragments of rude pottery, on some pieces of which I was able to trace portions of rough designs.

At the summit of the spur, on an impregnable bluff, stand the two ruined towers, almost overhanging the valley on one side, a precipitous descent falling away from the two others, while the steep path we came up by was guarded by line upon line of mouldering walls. Looking down, the scene was magnificent: first, the gorge with its sparkling stream; beyond, the grey ruins of the Daughter's Fortress, and beyond that, again, the plain stretching away, a green expanse streaked with wandering, silver lines of water, to the hazy blue hills on the horizon.

Paying a visit to a place on the slope whence the people of old must surely have obtained those huge slabs of building stone, so symmetrically square and oblong were the great boulders, I descended and walked back along the valley to camp.

It may seem that I have paid a disproportionate amount of attention to this old city of Shahpur; but I must confess that there were few places in Persia

which more excited my interest and awakened my imagination. I have, in addition, the defence that this place has been strangely neglected by travellers. Few of the old writers make any mention of it, and the attractions of its famous rival, Persepolis, have served to divert from it that regard which is undoubtedly its due. I am certain that the city and all around it would well repay thorough exploration.

Much undoubtedly remains to be discovered in this city of the dead. Up to the present nothing has apparently been done in the way of excavating, yet where so many thousand souls lived and died there must be plenty of scope for such work, and I strongly believe that it would repay those who undertook it. The parts I would suggest as being especially worthy of attention are certain portions of the Kileh-i-Dokhter, the obvious sites of ancient houses in the ruined city, and the floor of the cave around the statue. There are also wells and subterranean passages which should be explored, and several other caves besides the large one might be worth excavating.

The Kileh-i-Pisar is not, perhaps, so promising, but the tower at the top might be tried. No doubt the bed of the river might contain much of interest, and the inhabitants of Nur Illah, the little present-day village close to Shahpur, say they can show several spots where coins are to be found, although anything they say must be treated with caution, and their attempts at extorting money for pointing out patches of ground, in which there is nothing more than their imagination to suggest any reason for supposing that there are buried coins, must be firmly withstood. There are, nevertheless, undoubtedly gold and silver coins to be found, for I have seen them.

In any case, the archæologist will find here a field

which has been practically untouched, and which, it is quite possible, has many treasures to give up.

My four days at Shahpur had proved full of interest, and it was with a feeling of unsatisfied desire and real regret that I left the old place. On the day of my departure, the reluctant sun had hidden behind some rare clouds, from which there poured a cold rain. Through the wet the old tablets seemed, somehow, more clear-cut than usual, and stood out with a dull distinctness. It was a sad, dreary scene, yet one, in a way, more befitting the story of the place, the tale of melancholy decay and desolation. There was an uncanny gloom over everything, and as I passed the great figures on the first tablet, down the scarred cheek of the pathetic suppliant Roman, praying on his knees, with outstretched hands, for mercy, there trickled a drop of water, which it needed little imagination to make into a tear.

CHAPTER VI

A BACKWATER OF THE PRESENT

‘Iram indeed is gone with all his Rose,
And Jamshyd’s sev’n-ring’d Cup where no one knows ;
But still a Ruby kindles in the Vine,
And many a Garden by the Water blows.’

FITZGERALD : *Omar Khayyám.*

COULD there be anything more depressingly disgusting than to be awakened amid the darkness of a winter’s morning in a cold little valley close under the snow-line by the furious rattle of rain driven before an icy wind on to a tent beneath which you lie, momentarily expecting to be overwhelmed by the descent of your frail roof? Such was my position in the early hours of the day on which I had to start out again from Shahpur.

Visions of tent-pegs pulled up, poles breaking, canvas collapsing, wandered through my semi-dormant mind. In the indecision common to such moments I debated feebly whether it might be better to surrender to such fears, take off what clothes I had on, run hastily out in the dark and make sure of safety, returning, shivering, to a rub down and bed again (this is always preferable to putting on more clothes for the expedition and getting them wet), or whether I should lie snug and trust to Providence. Eventually I did the latter, and Providence just held out till daybreak. Then, peeping out, I found that in truth several tent-pegs were drawn, the walls of my

tent were sloppily subsiding, and the whole edifice was in a most precarious condition. In spite of continued efforts to set things right, at last, while I was making a hasty meal, like the traditional old man of Norwich, off cold porridge, there was an ominous crack, and the whole tent gently came down upon me. I yelled for Kishna, Kalicha, anyone, and succeeded in holding things up until they came. Once more matters were patched up, and a hurried packing began. But, alas ! in the middle of this there came a crash, and the tent-pole snapped in half. I caught it as it came down, and held the two pieces together till my fingers were numb with the cold and wet. Meanwhile, everything was thrown together, extricated and dumped on the sodden earth, with a mackintosh sheet thrown over the more precious articles. Next the mules were loaded, a dreary, chill process, and at last my draggled caravan was ready to start, and we were off through the driving rain on our fifteen-mile march.

The plain of Kazerun, which I was now traversing for the third time, was by far the most picturesque piece of landscape I had hitherto met with in Persia. Besides the attractions of antiquity, it forms a singularly delightful contrast to the deserts and desolations further south.

The watercourses are fringed with sedgy banks, and the whole expanse of the plain is dotted with little tilled fields and picturesque walled gardens. Nor are these the only attractions of the plain. It is rich in game, and the sportsman will find snipe, duck, geese, and plover ready for his delectation and his dinner.

By the irony of fate, it happened that just as I arrived at this comparative paradise my gun had snapped off short at the stock, and I was left with a pair of barrels ending in a jagged piece of wood. This

fact seemed to be by some mysterious means immediately communicated to the animal world. The game of the place became infected with malicious devils. Snipe would get up at my very feet and corkscrew away at what seemed to me about half their usual pace. Duck would calmly fly a few feet over my head and splash into a pool within easy range. Plover sat a few feet off the road and scrutinized me with infuriating nonchalance as I passed.

One day of this, and then I was able to take my gun to the bazaar at Kazerun, so that on my return to Shahpur I set off with what I fondly imagined to be a thoroughly efficient weapon. Now, thought I to myself, let the snipe rise under my nose, and the duck fly over my head, and the plover sit and look at me! But, alas! I had reckoned without my host, or, rather, without the Persian artificer's methods. Bent on sport, I had separated myself from my caravan, and was walking along waiting for the chance of a shot, my gun resting carelessly on my shoulder. It continued to rest there until I approached that part of the plain where I had formerly been insulted by the aforesaid birds. Then, without the slightest warning, the barrels fell heavily to the ground behind me, and I was left idiotically marching along, grasping my old friend, the broken piece of stock.

When I looked into matters a little further I was not surprised at what had happened, for I found that the plate which I had supposed securely riveted the two pieces together was skilfully stuck on with nothing more permanent than glue. Not at all a bad sample of Persian work!

Naturally, the game was now even more offensively impertinent than before, and my soul was particularly distressed by a certain snipe which acted as a sort of

advance-guard to my progress, flying in front of me for 20 yards, then settling, and repeating the process when I got within a little distance. After a time this became too much for me to bear, and, thought I to myself, I can at least stop him doing this; so, stuffing two cartridges into the stockless barrels of my gun, the next time he rose, I held them straight in front of me, fired as far as possible in his direction, and missed him. He did not, however, further trifle with my feelings. One cartridge was left in the barrel, and as at the moment a small flock of teal presumed on my offenceless position to fly over my head, I let it off at them, and was rewarded for the sore hand that the recoil of the jagged end caused me by bringing down two. Dinner for, at all events, that night and the next was assured.

On my return journey in the rain, the weather as well as the condition of my gun forbade any thoughts of sport, and, indeed, except for one day's shooting with a borrowed weapon, I had to refrain therefrom until at last, at Shiraz, I found a workman capable of replacing the old stock by an altogether new one.

It was weary work, trudging away through the rain, and our hearts rejoiced when at last we reached Kazerun, warmth, food, and a night's rest.

In and all around Kazerun there are gardens, the first that we had seen on our travels. I had long looked forward to making the acquaintance of those places of roses and nightingales with which Omar and Fitzgerald and many a poem and song had made the mind familiar. Who has not pictured the Persian poet of old basking at ease in some shady nook, whither cool breezes would bring the fragrance of flowers;—at hand, perhaps, his 'jug of wine,' and possibly something more than a 'loaf of bread';—

certainly a 'thou' to companion him in his lazy ease, the while he set down thoughts that in generations to come would delight the minds of men? I had not the fortune to visit such a scene in the month of roses; but even in the winter-time the charm of the Persian garden has not departed.

I think if I were to be asked to draw a typical Persian scene, it would be a soft symphony in browns and dark greens, backed by hazy pink hills and vivid blue sky. On the right there would be a little grove of trees—firs, I think, or possibly, if our garden is further south, palms,—and towards the centre of the picture would be set a Persian garden. The high brown walls, topped by the dark green spires of the glorious Persian cypresses, would rise, maybe, from a little open Mahometan graveyard, which, with its quaint, decaying tombstones and tiny huts of the dead, would run far down into the foreground. On the left a rough winding track would wander away over a long dusty plain and lose itself in a distant line of pink hills.

Let us step into the picture,—and, picking a path between the little graves, make our way up to the broad doorway in the tall, square gatehouse, which is the only break, save the cypress-spires, in the long monotony of brown wall. There may be a guardian at the entrance of our garden, some solemn Persian half asleep in a corner of a dark little room. If there is, he will come out, and, bowing courteously to us, bid us welcome and pass through.

Inside the square of walls there is perfect peace. Beyond, the world may do what it likes; kingdoms may rise and fall, men live and fight and love and die; but inside our Persian garden there is only the sun and the trees, the oranges and the roses. It is a

place of Oriental content, the content that knows not time nor incident, but only lives on until at last it just drops asleep and is gone. The high walls keep out all the noise and bustle of the world, and the only sounds that break the lazy stillness are the hum of the bees and the song of the nightingales.

In such a place, surely, the civilization of the East takes a new meaning, and there is no more wonder that in these strange lands men are satisfied merely to live and to be at peace, content to let the rest of the world fight wearily for what is never worth the winning. Omar is right :—

‘Perplex no more with Human or Divine,
To-morrow’s tangle to the winds resign,
And lose your fingers in the tresses of
The Cypress-slender Minister of Wine.

And if the Wine you drink, the Lip you press,
End in what All begins and ends in—Yes ;
‘Think then you are TO-DAY what YESTERDAY
You were—TO-MORROW you shall not be less.’

Our garden is no prim English place with well-mown lawns and gravel walks. It is a place of rambling little paths, fringed with a wealth of orange-trees and bushes ;—a secluded wilderness of green restfulness. Even in the most ungentle season there are oranges hanging from the boughs and verdure to comfort the eye, while later, in the vivid heat of spring, the roses load the heavy air with their perfume.

Under the blazing summer sun, the gardens must, I fancy, lie void of movement in the throbbing heat ; only, there are corners where by some pool of still water, which by its very presence gives refreshment, it is possible to lie and doze through the panting day. Then, in the evening, when the sun has sunk and the great Eastern moon has peeped over the black line of

wall, to bathe the whole garden in a silvery flood of light and cast a sharp network of leafy shadows on the white paths; when the air itself abates its hot breath and caresses the face with soft warm lips—who, then, would not lie in our garden and dream of this world and the next?

I remember my first visit to a Persian garden; no roses, no nightingales, only the oranges were there, and the little paths and the bushes and the cypresses. The sun streamed through the branches and made the rich-coloured fruit glow as it nestled among the green. Heavens! it was so hot, and I was so thirsty; yet it was not my garden, and not knowing as yet much of Persian etiquette, I stood, a very Tantalus, gazing at the feast above my head. At last my Persian host casually suggested that I might try the flavour of his oranges. The first was a practical joke. He handed me with a sweet smile a luscious-looking little thing, which, when I took a bite of it, seemed, indeed, by no means to belie its appearance. But wait a moment. Just as I was congratulating him, the most appalling bitterness began to make itself felt in my mouth, a bitterness more of medicine than of anything else. My congratulations, drowned, perhaps, by this flood of bitterness, hung half-delivered on my lips, not so much from want of politeness as from the bewilderment of surprise. My evident consternation vastly pleased my host, who roared with laughter at the success of his little trick, and hastened to remedy it by offering an orange of such admirable flavour that I gratified my own appetite and his vanity by consuming no less than three.

A little later in the day there came the turn of the pomegranates. To my mind a pomegranate rivals the strawberry, in that 'God, indeed, might have made a

better fruit, but He never did.' Let no one take his idea of a pomegranate from the miserable specimens usually met with in this country. It would be fairer to judge of a fresh herring from a kipper.

The eating of a pomegranate in its native land on a hot day is a thing to be remembered; but is also a thing to be done in private. There is a saying that a custard apple should only be eaten in a bath; nothing less capacious is appropriate to the consumption of pomegranates. Some people, it is true, wantonly cut through its hard skin and pick out with a spoon the mass of pink jelly and pips, thus sacrificing the flavour of the fruit to a fastidious politeness. The truth is that, as I say, the pomegranate should only be eaten in secret. There is only one satisfactory method, and that is the one which Nature has pointed out as obvious, and needs no appliances of civilization. Take the pomegranate, which is rather larger than an orange and has a thick, horny skin, firmly in both hands and bite a small hole in its hide; then, treating it exactly as a small boy treats an orange (into which he has thrust his finger, filling the hole thus made with a lump of sugar), suck out the juice of the fruit. In this way you do not pollute the flavour by any contact of metal, you escape the trouble of the innumerable pips, and, incidentally, you cannot avoid covering a considerable portion of your face with a pink stain.

This, however, is the only truly delectable way of eating a pomegranate.

At Kazerun I enjoyed the first civilized dinner I had had the fortune to meet with for a good many days. It was, indeed, quite a ceremonial affair, and was due to the courtesy of the hospitable gentleman who was here in charge of the telegraph. I was not the only guest. An Armenian Archbishop and his

retinue were making the journey down to the Gulf with the intention of travelling to India, and these dignitaries were the chief persons at the banquet I had the honour to attend. The party at the table actually consisted of the Archbishop himself, his right-hand man—Father Jacob, another priest, our host, and myself.

The Archbishop was a genial, patriarchal old gentleman with an immense brown beard. He could not speak English, so all our communications had to be carried on through Father Jacob, who, in fact, himself carried on nothing but a vicarious conversation throughout dinner. Our host spoke little, and the other priest confined his efforts to dumbly absorbing the conversation and the food.

Considering the rather difficult conditions, our talk, which I remember dealt mainly with archæology, was interesting and fairly fluent. To make a remark was rather a complicated process. First the Archbishop, he looking at me and I at him, would deliver himself of a sentence which was utterly incomprehensible as far as I was concerned. Then we would both of us turn and look at Father Jacob, who would translate it, with assistance from our host, for my benefit. Having arrived at an idea of the gist of the Archbishop's remark, I would then think out an answer. We would both look at one another, I would say it, and then, respectfully turning to Father Jacob, we would await his rendering thereof. It was a solemn business, and somehow or another it is difficult not to feel the futility of a remark when it is heard wandering round the table disguised in various languages.

The dinner itself I have advisedly described as civilized, for it was certainly not European. As a matter of fact, it was an extremely good Persian meal.

First came a dish of *fesinjun*,—a fat capon, partly grilled and then stewed in a mixture of pomegranate juice and powdered walnut. This was the *pièce de resistance* of the meal, and the only other thing I can remember as being worthy of notice on account of its distinctly Persian characteristic was the bread, a peculiar black variety, warm and spongy.

After dinner the Archbishop smoked a Kalia.

Now, the Kalia is such an important feature in Persian life that I think it must have a little chapter to itself.

CHAPTER VII

THE KALIAN

‘Sublime tobacco ! which from east to west
Cheers the tar’s labour or the Turkman’s rest ;
Which on the Moslem’s ottoman divides
His hours, and rivals opium and his brides ;
Magnificent in Stamboul, but less grand,
Though not less loved, in Wapping or the Strand ;
Divine in Hookas, glorious in a pipe,
When tipped with amber, mellow, rich, and ripe ;
Like other charmers, wooing the caress,
More dazzlingly when daring in full dress ;
Yet thy true lovers more admire by far
Thy naked beauties—Give me a cigar !’

BYRON : *The Island*, Canto XIX.

To the sane mortal it must sometimes seem a strange thing that men can take a delight in filling their mouths and lungs with the smoke made by the burning of a dried leaf. But when heroes have deigned to introduce it, philosophers to use it, and poets to laud it, who shall criticize the custom ? Certainly no one in Persia would presume to be guilty of such sacrilege. From the earliest times the Persian has been a devotee of the god of tobacco. Thus testifies Tavernier :—

‘The Persians both men and women are so addicted to take Tobacco that to take Tobacco from them, is to take away their lives. So that if the King should prohibit Tobacco for any time, he would lose a good part of his revenue. However, Sha-Sefi in a humor having

once forbidden Tobacco to be taken in any part of his Dominion, his Spies (that are in every City) found in the Indian Inn two rich Merchants of that Nation smoking their noses. Immediately they were seiz'd, bound and carry'd to the King, who commanded forthwith that Justice should be done upon them in the Meidan, which was, that they should pour melted lead down their throats till they were dead.' So Tobacco has its martyrs, too !

Again, says the old traveller :—' They suck and smoke of their Tobacco through water in a long glass bottle, by which means it comes cool into their mouths ; else they would never be able to take it all day long as they do. They sing very little in their Cups ; but they recite a vast number of wicked Verses, which they rehearse with a great deal of gravity. They are so accustomed to take Tobacco, both men and women, that a poor tradesman that has not above five *sous* to spend, will lay out three of them in Tobacco. If they have none, they say that they should not have *damaque*, that is, gladness in their hearts. Many will confess that the excessive taking Tobacco is hurtful ; but if you tell them of it, they answer in a word, *Adedeboud*, 'Tis the custom.'

I in my small way did my best to observe and set down the details of this important portion of Persian life. The Kalian is the national Persian pipe, and a very imposing affair it is. I bought one when I was in Persia and brought it home, where it has been smoked by various people, — with various effects. Most of the smokers after a few whiffs absented themselves on some inadequate excuse. It is true that some acclimatization is needed before the Kalian can be enjoyed, but when its peculiarities are understood, and the smoker becomes practised in the art, it is

undoubtedly a cool and refreshing way of taking tobacco.

In appearance the Kalian looks like a compound of a jar and a walking-stick, the whole being surmounted by a miniature brazier full of tobacco and charcoal. The Kalian smoked by my Archbishop was a huge silver and wood device about 3 feet high. At the bottom was a silver bottle-shaped vase containing water. Into this was thrust a stopper pierced by a wooden tube extending down into the water and rising, ornamented externally by lavish carving, until it terminated in a small silver head, the top of which was hollowed through to contain, first, one solitary piece of charcoal laid across the opening into the stem itself, then a carefully piled-up heap of tobacco, and, lastly, a little mound of red-hot charcoal embers, contained within a silver circlet. From the silver bowl there projected at an angle a plain wooden mouthpiece about 2 feet long.

To enjoy a smoke in Persia, when the Kalian is ready (and it needs considerable preparation), the smoker places a silver bowl on a little footstool, so that the end of the mouthpiece is at a comfortable height for his mouth, and exhausting his lungs of air, applies his mouth thereto. Then he sucks in breath as hard as he can, a bubbling sound is heard, and after three or four hearty pulls he will have the satisfaction of finding his mouth and lungs full of smoke. (Needless to say, it would be useless to attempt to smoke a Kalian without inhaling.) The air, of course, descends through the charcoal and tobacco down the central chimney into the water, bubbling through which it finds its way up the mouthpiece into the smoker's mouth.

To prepare a Kalian is a work of art. The Persian

grandee often takes infinite pains to find an expert man—or, more generally, a boy—who shall do nothing but prepare Kalias, and he is no mean personage in the family when found. Here are the directions roughly—it needs an artist, though, to carry them out successfully.

The tobacco is generally native Shirazi—a light brown, dry, mild variety. Powder a small saucerful carefully, then damp it till it clings. Fill the ‘reservoir,’ or bottle-shaped vase, at the bottom of the Kalian with water till, by the bubbling sound when you suck, you know enough has been poured in. If there is too much you will probably get a mouthful of it, in which case, blow down the tube, and the water will spout out of the stem (from which, of course, you have removed the top part) and fall over the wooden parts. The plug of compressed cloth which surrounds the base of the wooden stem, which is to fill the mouth of the ‘reservoir,’ should be moistened to make it stop the aperture completely. Then fill the tobacco bowl. This is where true skill comes into play. Select a small piece of cold charcoal, large enough to just fall into the narrow inlet and semi-stop it. This is to prevent the tobacco from falling into the stem. Then pour moist tobacco evenly into the bowl; it should form a mass rising about an inch above the rim. Next, keeping the first fingers on the rim, gently press the tobacco down all round, leaving a cone about an inch in diameter unpressed in the centre. When finished it should present a level plain about half an inch above the rim, with, in the centre, a small hillock. Round this lightly place the silver circlet (which is something like a large napkin ring), and, selecting half a dozen little pieces of live charcoal, place them inside the circlet on top of the little hillock of tobacco.

Now you may 'draw'—and for about two minutes you will spend a vast amount of breath in vain, at last being rewarded by a cool mouthful of smoke;—your Kalian is in full blast. Of course, only the tobacco in the centre is consumed, and that outside the silver circlet can be used again—but not too often or it will make the Kalian foul, which also will result if the latter is not frequently cleaned.

The Kalian is not so much a personal as a social pipe, and after a dinner-party one Kalian serves the whole company. It is handed from one guest to another, and it is the host who gives himself the labour of sucking until the apparatus is in good going order. When passing the Kalian it is etiquette to first remove the top half of the instrument and take a few 'pulls' in order that fresh air may find its way into the 'bowl.'

Such is the nature, method, and etiquette of the Persian pipe.

Personally, with Byron, 'Give me a cigar.'

CHAPTER VIII

BY THE WAYSIDE

'The earth expanding right hand and left hand,
The picture alive, every part in its best light,
The music falling in where it is wanted, and stopping where it
is not wanted,
The cheerful voice of the public road, the gay fresh sentiment
of the road.'

WALT WHITMAN.

SOON after leaving Kazerun came the cold and repellent 'Daughter's' Pass. Cold she was in very truth when I visited her, for she was clad in ice and snow.

Crossing a causeway over a marsh and passing an ill-executed stone picture in the rock—a late imitation of the great Sassanian works—we set about the ascent. A fine piece of work, this road, up the precipitous rock, zigzagging with turn after turn, until at last, at the top, it bursts out upon an undulating piece of ground from which there is to be seen a view which is ample reward for the painful climb.

After dealing with the 'Daughter' there still remains to be surmounted one last kotal,—the Pass of the Old Woman, and between the young lady and the old lady there is a little valley thickly dotted with oak-trees, which forms a welcome relief to the tired men and beasts ere they commence the second ascent.

This is not so steep in any part as those formerly encountered, but it compensates for this by the unutterable vileness of the track. Half-way up the pass is the little caravanserai of Mian Kotal, and as we reached this at the end of our hard day, the sun sank in a glory of silver and green and blue. The long-looked-for crescent moon, hanging in the purple sky to show that Ramazan was over, and the shimmer of snow over all the hills around, promised a bitter night.

Here, as I was unable to make use of the telegraph rest-room, I had to avail myself of the ordinary hospitality extended to travellers by the Persian caravanserai.

To the European traveller there is something very curious in the idea of a public rest-house opening its doors to all and sundry wayfarers. The prince, the beggar, the native, the foreigner, all have one ending to their journey, all have the same accommodation for their reception. No wonder the Persian mind has compared life to a journey and death to its caravan-serai, at which all in turn must inevitably arrive, and where all conditions and classes find themselves brought to an equality.

Imagine a great square courtyard littered with filth, crowded often with beasts of all kinds and packages of every description. Round the four walls run a series of little arches sheltering scanty thresholds raised a few feet above the level of the courtyard, from which narrow doorways lead to dark little rooms, ill-ventilated and often smelly and dirty. The walls are generally mud-plastered, and the provisions for ventilation and light conspicuous by their absence. Sometimes there is a second tier of these small dwellings, and if so they will generally be found more habitable,

since the Persian so far values ease above trouble that he will rather sleep handily in a stuffy and unclean lower room than take the extra trouble necessary to obtain fresh air and cleanliness upstairs. Into the courtyard the way lies through an imposing gateway, flanked sometimes by two towers. There is, of course, no arrangement made for anything except mere housing accommodation. The little cells are destitute of everything except dirt. As Fryer quaintly puts it in language which, if it is rather strong for present ears, is scarcely too strong for present conditions in Persia.

‘Coming to our Inns, we have no Host, or young Damofels to bid us Welcome, nor other Furniture than Bare Walls ; no Rooms Swept, nor Cleanly Entertainment, Tables neatly Spread, or Maidens to Attend with Voice or Lute to Exhilarate the Weary Passenger ; but instead of these, Apartments covered with Filth ; Musick indeed there is of Humming Gnats pricking us to keep an unwilling Measure to their Comfort : So that here is neither Provision for Man or Beast, only an open House, with no enlivening Glafs of Pontack, or Poinant Cheer to encourage the Badness of the March ; but every Four or Five *Pharfangs*, i.e. *Parafangæ*, a German League, on the King’s High way, a *Caravan Ser Raw*, as dirty as *Augeus* his Stable, those before always leaving the next comer work enough to cleanse where they have been ; that after coming in Tired, they are more intent to spread their Carpets for Repose, than remove the incrustated Cake of Sluttery, the constant Nursery of Flies and Bees, they often bringing their Horses into the same Bed-Chamber.’

Perhaps the walls of its rooms are the most interesting part of a caravanserai.

Ever since the pre-historic cave-dweller learned to scratch irreverent images of the beasts of his day upon the sides of his dwelling-place, the habit of leaving some inscription to tell of his sometime presence has inflamed the breast of man (when the Garden of Eden is discovered, no doubt Adam's name will be found inscribed in a prominent place). True to man's ancient habit, the Persian rivals 'Arry of 'Ampstead 'Eath in his effort to tell the traveller who shall come after him that he has had a predecessor. Where my friend the Persian shows his superiority to 'Arry, however, is in the place and material of his inscription. Instead of desecrating without discrimination everything, from a park paling to a statue, which he can lay pencil upon, the Persian reserves his efforts for the walls of a caravanserai, or some such innocent place, and instead of merely defacing the place with his own unimportant name or some alleged witticism, the Persian either quotes some apposite verse from a great poet, or himself composes a few little lines inspired by the surroundings,—frequently not even appending his name thereto. Thus it comes about that the walls of a caravan-serai are a book which he who runs may read, and a man might do worse than make a collection of couplets, stanzas, and sentences culled from such places.

Among the lines of Arabic lettering that surrounded my head when I lay on my little camp-bed in the caravanserai at Mian Kotal, one particular couplet caught my eye in the candle-light. It aroused my interest, although I could not wholly translate it, and so I got Saif to fully explain it for my benefit. Name and date there were none. Here is a literal translation of the words, and here is a little para-

phrase that I dared to make in the metre of Omar himself.

‘ To whatsoever place I come,
In whatsoever house I lodge,
With water o’ mine eyes I write :
“ Beloved, empty is thy place.” ’

‘ Whitherso’er my lonely wand’rings lie,
Upon the white-walled caravanseraï
This with the water o’ mine eyes I write :
“ Beloved, O ! that it were Thou and I.” ’

Maybe the story was worth the hearing, maybe not ; at any rate, I drowsily wondered over the lonely Persian lover and his mistress. Where were they now, these two ? Was she very beautiful ? Was their love-story ever finished ? Were they dead long ago, or did there in some little Persian town still live an old dotard and a withered hag who once were the young gallant and his beloved ? And so, wondering, I fell asleep. . . .

When the mind, disconnected, as it were, from its workaday machinery and wandering irresponsibly in the strange land of dreams, is rudely called back by some sudden noise or movement, the immediate result is to invariably produce an unpleasant sensation of startled unreadiness. When, even after the first swift shock has passed, and the mental machinery is again connected up, the impression of some unusual and ill-omened happening still remains, the situation becomes, if anything, worse. Unaccustomed surroundings, strange men talking in a strange tongue, the dim light of lanterns uncertainly showing uncouth figures and casting flickering inhuman shadows,—I started up into a sitting position, and in a voice that was not yet quite ready to speak asked what was the matter.

The little group clustered round my bed ceased their muttering and left the explanation to Saif. 'Sir,' he said, 'Khan Khana, the under-muleteer, fell off his mule when he was watering the beasts, and he is very bad. Will you come and see him and give him medicine?' I put my boots on and a coat over my nightclothes, and then was led across the filthy yard to the little arched room where my retinue had disposed themselves. Stooping down under the doorway, I entered. In a corner was the man who was ill, lying on a bag of straw and some litter, and groaning persistently and loudly. There is a strange and almost frightening feeling of paralysing helplessness which comes over one who has no medical knowledge on the occasion of some accident to the wonderful and mysterious mechanism of the body. It is a horrible exaggeration of the impotent ignorance with which a tyro sees the motor-car, which he is driving, slowly come to a stop and refuse utterly to budge afterwards. He knows there is something wrong, but where—heaven knows. He vaguely taps and pulls and uncertainly searches; but the business is above him. So it was with me. There was a man, evidently seriously injured, but where, I was not competent to determine. I knelt down and asked him where the pain was, and amid his groans he pointed to his right side. I did not like to pull him about much, but I tried gently, by pressing with my fingers, to find the seat of the injury, which was soon indicated by the increased anguish of the sufferer as I approached it. After a little, I came to the conclusion that it was at all events quite likely that he had incurred no internal injury, but that he had either broken or badly bruised his hip-bone. In this situation, I was practically powerless, but I cheered him up, gave him some

ointment and a tabloid or two of sulphonal to send him to sleep, and possibly to effect a faith cure, for the Persian believes in medicine almost as much as in doctors. Then, thanking my stars that things were not worse, I went back to bed with the nightmare feeling much diminished.

Next day was a bad time for Khan Khana ; he had to be transported through the day's march, and every movement roused him to agonized groans. Saif and I shared a pony so that he might ride the whole way ; but a score of miles uneasily balanced on a saddle with a broken hip-bone is a dreadful experience, and when the poor chap at last reached Dasht-i-Arzin, he was worn out with pain and fatigue.

This day, which dawned bright and keen, was to bring me to the highest point that I reached before crossing the Elburz mountains to the Caspian. We had steadily climbed up and up the gigantic stairway, until now we stood many thousand feet above the sea. All around, the snow lay deep, while the path itself was a slippery mass of ice and frozen mud. The mules continually collapsed, and had to be unloaded and helped to their feet, and the journey was a slow and infinitely laborious one. At last the summit was reached, and we looked down upon a great snow-clad plain, of which the right portion was covered by a desolate frozen lake. Away into the distance through the great white desert there meandered the black line of our little path, until it faded altogether out of sight in the far distance. Down into this plain we slowly made our way, the descent of the pass being only one degree less arduous than the ascent thereof. The sides of the hill were clothed with scrubby trees denuded of all leaves, and stretching gaunt, unfriendly arms to the dull sky. It was, indeed, a dreary scene, and the

hearts of all of us were glad when we passed through a graveyard decked with grotesque stone lions, close under the rocky heights of the far extremity of the plain, and came in to the welcome sight of a blazing fire at the telegraph office of Dasht-i-Arzin.

By the great kindness of the official who usually resided in this little place, but who now was away, and whom I had met at an earlier stage of my journey, I was privileged to have access to his special part of the telegraph building. He had entrusted to me the secret of the letter-lock upon his private door, and had told me I should find there a twelve-bore gun, with which, since my own was out of action, I could enjoy some shooting on the frozen lake. True enough, there it was, and there also, among some other books, was the third volume of Disraeli's 'Curiosities of Literature.' I devoured Disraeli and dinner together.

It turned out that the frozen lake gave good sport ; there were duck, snipe, and geese, while, had I been so inclined, by turning right or left to the mountains, I could have had the satisfaction of at all events pursuing, if not bringing down, a Persian ibex or a moufflon, with the possible chance of a leopard or bear. However, I only tried the lake, and the morning after my arrival sallied forth with a couple of Persians.

The sun blazed back from the unsullied snow with a blinding light, which much tried the eyes ; but after a considerable walk in the keen morning air over the crisp snow the hunting-grounds were reached, and then in the excitement of stalking duck, and putting up snipe among the sedgy frozen pools and reedy marshes, hot-blooded excitement overcame all other sensations. I wanted particularly to enjoy some snipe-shooting, but in spite of all my efforts, my guides led me steadily away from what I felt sure

must be the best snipe-grounds, into places where the only game to be found was duck and geese. After a little I found that a suspicion which had been growing upon me was correct ;—they thought a man mad who wanted to go and chase wretched little birds like snipe, when there were to be had large and important creatures such as duck or geese. In this, as in a great many other things in Persia, appearance is everything, and, with no considerations as to skill, *shikar* is rated according to size.

There are other inhabitants of this place besides feathered ones, for at one time through the tall rushes I caught a glimpse of black, moving bodies, which turned out to be, as I had imagined, wild boar, which at our approach scuttled with gradually subsiding wallowings and splashings deep into a great marsh.

As the short day came to a close, the cold seemed to descend like a mantle from the hills and cling over the low-lying land and water. The mixture of ice, snow, and mud in which I had been tramping all day, took ever a more bitter grip of my flesh, and when, after a weary plod, I again reached 'home,' I felt, as I sat on the floor by the fire, that infinite satisfaction of repose which comes after hard and well-rewarded labour. The reward, indeed, came up to my expectations, for when I counted the bag, it turned out to total thirty head—fourteen duck and sixteen snipe, which provided me and my followers with many a good meal for some days to come. They were purchased, however, at the cost of some little physical discomfort, for it was only just as I fell asleep that my feet at length woke up.

The next stage was an uninteresting one among a wilderness of barren hills, and then came the march into Shiraz. The country about here, at all events at



THE GARDENS OF SHIKAZ.

the time of year that I traversed it, cannot be pronounced a success in any way. As scenery it is a decided failure—a billow-like succession of barren hillocks, running back into grim round-shouldered hills flecked with snow, while as far as convenience for travelling is concerned, let him decide who has spent five hours stumbling over a track which has the appearance of winding its way in and about the newly mended road of some careless giant who has omitted to put the steam roller over it.

All this changes with the first glimpse of the valley of Shiraz. Round a corner, I remember, it suddenly came into sight. There it lay, far ahead and beneath, stretching away into the distance, a long, misty, open plain, flecked with the black patches of its famous gardens.

After two long days of plodding constantly downwards, we had now come to the final descent, and at last, by the caravanserai of Chinar, my caravan came out upon a broad vista of stone-strewn earth stretching away, to be lost among the wooded gardens ahead. Along this stony pretence at a road was straggling at the moment I came upon it, a portion of the Persian army, starting on its first march to Bushire. For several miles we continued to pass this military pageant; but pray do not let it be thought that this implies an army of unusual size. It was not the numbers but the disposition of these forces which led to their occupying so considerable a space. There must have been about 400 Persian soldiers in all, and I regret that I cannot give any particulars as to the formation of their advance, for to the outward eye there was none. Little groups of two or three wandered by at irregular intervals, sometimes morosely plodding along, sometimes enlivening—or depressing—

their companions by singing at the top of their voices the peculiar, monotonous cadences of the East. An attempt to decide on the regulation uniform of the Persian soldier also ended in failure, as no two men appeared to be dressed alike. However, by a system of deduction from the number of instances in which various garments occurred in conjunction, I arrived at the following picture of that seemingly visionary person, the fully equipped Persian private. The individual (of a brown colour, and, as it may be, moustached, bearded, or with the growth of a more or less indefinite period) is surmounted by an astrachan hat shaped like a saucepan without a handle, in the front of which is set the badge of the Lion and the Sun, varying in brightness in the inverse ratio of the number of days it has been left uncleaned. The tunic is of a coarse blue cotton cloth, sometimes slashed with red, and frequently worn open, displaying the presence or absence of the wearer's shirt. The 'pants'—of which the wearing would seem a matter of individual taste, the substitutes being too various to allow of separate mention (which is perhaps as well)—are of a like material, with a broad red stripe. Descending lower, it appeared the custom to wear stockings—again the taste of the wearer being consulted; and beneath all protruded the regulation boot. Those most adapted to fighting carried rifles of an antique pattern slung over their shoulders, the remainder wandered along singly or in twos and threes, chatting convivially. The only military fact I am able to state with absolute certainty is that there was no band, the only form of music we came across being a man who made a vocal noise, fluctuating between two or three notes. He passed by a foot or so away, so wrapped up in this performance that he seemed entirely unaware of our

presence, and continued while he stumbled past over the loose stones to pour forth his soul at the top of his voice into the air immediately in front of him.

The whole affair gave the impression of some huge go-as-you-please picnic. Long after the army had at last wandered by, we came upon its officer,—apparently its solitary officer. He was preparing to mount an excellent Arab horse, and was quite smartly attired ; in comparison to his troops, indeed, he was an exquisite dandy. As we came up, he and the gentleman to whom he was saying farewell, indulged in one last pathetic kiss, after which our military friend scrambled to the saddle, and, leaning over his horse's mane in the customary Persian fashion, lolloped off after his command.

The foregoing must not, perhaps, be taken as quite a fair description of the Persian soldiery under all conditions, for I have seen them, on ceremonial duty, when their conduct and appearance showed great improvement. The army is then dressed more or less alike, and it walks most correctly in single file, irresistibly suggesting a serious game of follow my leader. At Teheran, indeed, it went so far as to 'form fours,' and presented a quite imposing spectacle—but we shall hear more of this when we come to that city.

Nor must it be imagined that the Persian himself forms bad material for a soldier. The hill tribes, with their independent fearlessness, given proper training, would make a magnificent body of hardy and efficient troops, while the Persian man is throughout a fine specimen of humanity, and could, with proper care, very probably make a useful soldier. The spirit, indeed, is wanting, but the flesh is strong, and were the spirit to increase in vigour no doubt the flesh would respond to its inspiration.

Dark was just closing in as we passed between the high walls of the rose gardens of Shiraz. As we neared the end of the first portion of our journeyings, anticipation, aided in my own case by a certain amount of excitement, had a wonderful vivifying effect upon us. Saif was inspired to gallop ahead. My muleteers chatted enthusiastically, and even raised their voices in discordant song. Even poor Khan Khana, still in agony, cheered up with the prospect of attaining in a few hours a house whence he would not have to move on next morning.

I had made up my mind to spend some short time in this, the first truly Persian city I came to, and was prepared to take a little native house to live in during my stay. But as I was riding in to the telegraph rest-room, where, till arrangements could be made the next day, I should have to stay, events occurred which caused an alteration in my plans. Fate, to whom I shall be always grateful for her kindness, had brought to me a new friend, to whom I am indebted, not only for interesting experiences and pleasant recollections of Shiraz, but for a friendship which, I trust, neither time nor distance will ever affect.

So it was that on this first night my course was diverted, there was extended to me a hospitality which, if it could have gained anything, would have gained by its spontaneity, and it was among unspeakable luxuries,—carpets, table-cloths, vases of flowers, furniture, and a bed with brass knobs,—that I spent my first night in the City of Roses and Nightingales.

CHAPTER IX

THE CITY OF ROSES AND NIGHTINGALES

‘The world to me has been a home ;
Wherever knowledge could be sought,
Through differing climes I loved to roam,
And every shade of feeling caught
From minds, whose varied fruits supply
The food of my philosophy.
And still the treasures of my store
Have made my wanderings less severe ;
From every spot some prize I bore,
From every harvest gleaned an ear,
But find no land can ever vie
With bright Shiraz in purity ;
And blest for ever be the spot
Which makes all other climes forgot !’

From HAFIZ.

SHIRAZ is not only the city of roses and nightingales. It is the city of poets—the city of wine—the city of fair women—of all that is soft and sweet and seductive. It is the traditional abode of conviviality and ease—and of the accomplishments and failings that spring therefrom. Perhaps there is no city in the whole of Persia, and indeed few in the annals of a nation’s history, that have been held up to fame more whole-heartedly and perennially than Shiraz. Its gardens, its vintages, and its sweet singers have surrounded it with a pleasant mist of romance, through which the hard facts of reality have seldom power to pierce. Nor, indeed, *pace* Lord Curzon, who explains the fame of Shiraz by the undoubted fact that ‘every

local goose is a swan,' is it at all impossible for even the casual traveller from foreign parts to understand and even to become possessed of some of the spirit which has cast its glamour about this city of the South.

Like Lord Curzon himself, I visited the city when the roses were dead and the nightingales dumb. Even then, however, the glorious sunshine and the superb air, the curious fascination of the broad panorama of plain studded with dark green patches of garden and surrounded by majestic hills, the clear moonlight nights with their Eastern harmonies of silver and black,—all these material surroundings added to the traditions of the place and the memory of its personages, certainly made a powerful appeal to the senses and imagination. When, later, the roses bloomed, the nightingales sang, and the whole place took on the garment of spring, it is easy to imagine how the Persian could find himself excited to the enthusiasm which found its expression in the rhapsodies of two famous poets, and which is a living sentiment at the present day.

It is not only from its natives that Shiraz has derived its reputation; the praises of the traveller have been added to those of the poet, and, indeed, in their extravagance the former sometimes even exceed the latter. The excellent Fryer ends an elaborate eulogy in his inimitable style, by a delightful tribute. 'The Nightingal,' he says, 'the fweet Harbinger of the Light, is a Constant Chearer of these Groves, Charming with its Warbling Strains the heavieft soul into a pleasing Extasy.'

Not only the city but the country round has had its meed of praise, for near by are the bowers of Mosellay and the famous stream of Ruknabad.

The climate, even the Englishman, with his proud possession of a patchwork of all weathers and atmospheres, must acknowledge to have its excellences. Rain rarely falls, snow scarcely ever, and while in summer the heat is perhaps a little overdone, on the whole it may be said that here may be met with the serenity of the Indian climate without its violence.

Apart from all these considerations, Shiraz has another claim to attention in the purity of its speech. Long ago Chardin observed: 'From Ebber to the Indies they speak Persian, more or less neat, as the people are more or less at a distance from Shiraz, where the purity of the Persian Language is spoken.'

And to-day his words hold good. Shiraz, indeed, with justice holds itself the Persian abode of learning. Even in these days, when its extent is circumscribed and its condition deteriorated;—days when there is a touch of pathos in the proud boast that 'when Shiraz was Shiraz, Cairo was one of its suburbs';—together with its roses and its nightingales and its wine, Shiraz preserves more than any other city its pride of intellect. To this its traditions help in no small measure. Although Meshed, the birthplace of 'Firdausi, of Essedi, of Ferid-ud-din 'Attar, of Jalal-ud-din Rumi, of Jami, of Hatifi, and many others,' may have a strong claim to be considered the Persian Parnassus, yet the two great poets who were born and died at Shiraz may almost be said to compensate in quality their want of quantity.

Saadi and Hafiz, since they unfortunately lack their Fitzgeralds, are not in England the household word that Omar, far less known to the Persian, has become, and that they themselves are in their native land.

But in Persia the amount of attention their writings receive and the way in which they are known and

quoted alike by prince and peasant, strikes a stranger with astonishment and admiration. The honour in which they are held is well exemplified in a little incident narrated by Malcolm in his 'Sketches of Persia.'

'Have you no laws,' said I one day to Aga Meer, 'but the Koran, and the traditions upon that volume?' 'We have,' said he, gravely, 'the maxims of Sadee.' 'Were I to judge from my own observations,' Malcolm himself goes on, 'I should say that these stories and maxims, which are known to all, from the King to the peasant, have fully as great an effect, in restraining the arbitrary and unjust exercise of power as the laws of the Prophet.'

Of the two poets, Saadi was the earlier, and, born at Shiraz in A.D. 1193, he led a long and, for a Persian, an energetic life.

To-day he lives chiefly by his two collections of poems—the 'Gulistan' (the Rose Garden) and the 'Bostan' (the Fruit Garden). These poems of philosophy and imagination, of Nature and of man, are still on the lips of the Persian nation, and the frequenter of little tea-taverns and out-of-the-way villages will be surprised to hear from some uncouth-looking barbarian quotations from one of his national poets. It is as though in the slums of London or the by-ways of a Midland county, the loafers and labourers were to be found quoting Shakespeare.

If Saadi is popular, Hafiz is scarcely less so. Almost as soon as Saadi's hands relaxed from the lyre, Hafiz arose to take it up, and from it called a song as sweet as Saadi's,—if slightly less conventional. Hafiz, indeed, like our friend Omar, broke the bonds of true Mahometanism and strayed into the pleasant land of voluptuous heresy. Love and wine were the chief

themes of his song, and the consequence was the inevitable one. In these more indulgent times, and in these less exigent parts of the earth, Mrs. Grundy would have been shocked and Hafiz would have become a hero. But in his time and in his land, there was more than Mrs. Grundy to cope with. Hafiz had set himself up against the recognized religion of his time. In those days, to preach the doctrine of pleasure as he did, was to preach the forbidden, and the consequence was that, popular as he might be among the people, he incurred the censure, and ultimately almost the excommunication, of the priests. After his death, indeed, in 1388, the true Mahometan of the day refused to let this errant poet be honoured with the proper rites of burial. Even in those days, however, there appears to have been a party in the land which imagined that genius condoned a certain amount of Bohemianism, and so it happened that an agreement was come to by which a lot should be drawn from Hafiz's own works, which was to regulate the disposal of his dead body, and to decide the knotty point as to whether he was to be for all time an infidel or a true believer. To obviate any possible connivance a small child was selected to determine the fateful question. Fate was kind, and this is the passage to which it directed the hand of the child :—

‘Turn not away from the last rites of Hafiz, for know that, though plunged deep in sin, he yet will rise to paradise.’

So his body got its burial and his soul is accounted blessed. His works, however, luckily remain just as they were.

There are some who to-day try to read into Hafiz as into Omar, an allegorical meaning. They strain the sense of words in order to prove that when Hafiz

talked of love and wine he meant something very much more respectable and very much less natural. In the same way that the obvious and beautiful meaning of the magnificent love-song of Solomon has been distorted to bring it into accordance with the theological precepts of a later age, so those who can never imagine that anything is great that is not in accordance with their own opinions, and that anything is good which does not confirm to a dogmatic asceticism, have endeavoured to show that both Omar and Hafiz concealed the spirit of a devout theologian beneath the expression of an amorous poet. Possibly, influenced by the most kindly motives, they think they are doing their hero a service by developing his righteousness at the expense of his reason. Personally, however, it is enough for me to give their songs their obvious meaning, to find in them merely the Divine expression of quite mundane things. So I will continue to believe that the writings of Hafiz and Omar that we possess, are quite satisfactory taken at their face value, and that there is no need to distort a single poem into that which the little girl, who was asked to define an allegory, aptly described as 'an earthly story with no earthly meaning.'

Now, as to the wine of Shiraz, that chief source of old Hafiz's delights and troubles.

There are two varieties, the red and the white, and having tasted both, my verdict is in favour of the white. The description, however, I will leave to the excellent Fryer, to whose experience and ability I do not pretend.

'The Wines of the Growth of this Country are esteemed the most Stomachial and Generous in all Persia and fittest for common drinking, when allayed a little with Water, otherwise too heady for the Brain,

and heavy for the Stomach, their Passage being retarded for want of that proper Vehicle: It is incredible to see what Quantities they drink at a Merry-meeting, and how unconcerned the next day they appear, and brisk about their Business, and will quaff you thus a whole Week together.'

Despite the injunctions of the Koran, the Persians seem to have never manufactured their wine for purely export purposes. On the point of the generous conviviality of the natives travellers are unanimous, and they seem to speak from considerable personal acquaintance with the subject.

Chardin's description of 'the Custom of the Country' in drinking is quite delightful, while Tavernier, speaking of the wine of Shiraz's traditional rival, remarks: 'They say that the Wine of *Ispahan* is cold upon the Stomach, but that it fumes into the Head. For its coldness upon the Stomach I can say little, but *I* know it will warm the Head, if a Man takes too much of it.'

Alas, alas! I fear that all this gives very little support to those who insist on the 'spirit' of Hafiz being rather of an animal than a vegetable nature.

In appearance Shiraz was certainly the most beautiful city with which it was my lot to meet in Persia;—let us just take a general view of the city from the heights to the North, which Le Bruyn chose 'as commodious for me to make a Draught of the city.'

The plain of Shiraz lies spread out before us like a map. Straight below is the city itself, still roughly enclosed by its mouldering walls and long useless moat. Away to the right the little wandering lanes and thickly packed brown houses thin out into stately gardens, surrounded with long, monotonous walls. Just now these gardens are, but for their evergreens,

grey and leafless. But everywhere the cypresses with the tall, shapely spires of dark green stand out vividly from among the multitude of their smaller comrades. There also, relieving the brown-grey sameness, show in delicate silver lines the trunks and tracery of the birches. The irregular brownness of the city is relieved by scattered blue domes,—the great Shah Chiragh and its brother mosques, rising above the smaller fry like monster ninepins. All around, the plain is walled with mountains, and far under the opposite hill there is a glint of water. In the dim distance to the left is an infinity of snow-like whiteness merging in the misty horizon ;—a strange sea of salt with headlands of rock projecting into its unfriendly waters. Everywhere the horizon is cut by jagged lines of hills, on the topmost crests of which glisten patches of snow, sinking softly into snowy masses of cloud. Above all the sun shines keenly down from the open blue.

Scrambling down, let us make our way along the broad, ill-made road over the bridge that spans the little river into the city itself. Our entrance is an unsavoury business. The Persian intelligence has not yet risen to drainage, and when in addition it is remembered that if anything except a human being dies, to the Shirazi mind the obvious place to dispose of it is the dry moat which now serves no other useful purpose, it is not surprising that we hurry as quickly as possible over this part of our journey. Dead bodies, skulls and bones of animals, even the skull of a man, and endless rubbish-heaps, we fly by them and enter more savoury regions.

Once upon a time near the gate of Kassab Khana there used to be several pillars of mortar in which some outlaws in the seventies were built in alive as a punishment for their crimes. They apparently took

'an unconscionable long time dying,' and after their death the pillars remained there as a warning and a monument until quite recently; but they have disappeared now, and our feelings need not be harrowed by the sight of such dismal portals to our approach.

Entering from the North we pass into the heart of the city, through a little scrubby market. Then we plunge straight into those great bazaars for which, above all Persian cities, Shiraz is famous. Shady at the height of noon on the hottest summer's day, dusk and gloomy, as now, in the winter's evening, these imposing, vaulted thoroughfares are indeed worthy of admiration and deserving of description. Franklin describes the Vakils Bazaar, the greatest in the city, in the following words: 'It is a long street, extending about a quarter of a mile, built entirely of brick, and roofed something in the style of the Piazzas in Covent Garden; it is lofty and well made; on each side are the shops of the tradesmen, merchants and others, in which are exposed for sale a variety of goods of all kinds.'

At the busiest time of day the scene in the long avenue and the shorter ones which cross it at right angles is a strange one. Each trade has its appointed portion of the bazaar. In one corner the copper-smiths and brass-workers are raising a tumultuous and reverberating din, which renders conversation an absolute impossibility; in another are the leather-workers laboriously hammering out patterns and stitching trappings. Other places are given up to the wool-workers, the hat-makers, the dyers, the bankers, and all the different trades which are necessary to supply the needs of civilization.

Each shop is a little arched recess, raised, like the small dwelling-places in a caravanserai, a few feet

above the level of the centre path, and leading back into recesses stored with goods, and darkly odorous of the commodity in which the merchant trades.

Down the centre throngs a motley multitude ; afoot, on horse, rich and poor, seller and buyer, there jostle one another here all sorts and conditions of men, jabbering, pushing, and, above all, haggling. Without his haggling the Persian merchant would be unrecognizable. It is, indeed, haggling that separates by a wide gulf the commerce of the East from that of the West. There are no labels on the goods in what answers in Persia to the shop-window. There are, indeed, no fixed prices for anything. The price of an article is what the seller will take and the buyer will give, and the process of sale is an endeavour to make these two coincide. Let no one imagine that he could blithely step into a shop in Persia, ask the price of a thing, receive an answer, and pay his money. That would not be the method of the East, where there is plenty of time, and a bargain may just as well take ten days, as ten hours or ten minutes.

One purchase cost me three weeks. I had the time to spare and the curiosity to see whether and when my Persian friend would meet my terms. It was in the matter of a small scimitar in a velvet case and with a carved ivory handle. I think it was twenty-five tomans (about £5) that he asked for this on the first occasion that I inquired after it. I offered him five. He smiled with a Persian shrug of his shoulders as if to imply 'the gentleman is jesting.' But the gentleman was not jesting, and after a little he went away without the scimitar. Day after day as I passed my friend I inquired the price of his scimitar. Day after day the price decreased. At last one day I said, —it was when the price had reached, I think, seven

tomans—‘To-morrow I leave Shiraz.’ I was sorry; the little affair of the scimitar had become quite an event in my daily life, and our discussions as to its price had led to a pleasant friendship springing up between me and my commercial antagonist. The cheerful and habitual inquiry after the price of the scimitar had almost come to represent some little attention. I am sure ‘How do you do?’ or ‘I hope your wife is well’ could have not pleased him more. (The latter inquiry, as a matter of fact, would have been a studied insult, for in Persia it is not permitted to ask after the health of a Persian gentleman’s wife. You may only say, ‘How is your family?’ such is the Persian strictness with regard to even the mention of a lady’s name.) We indulged in one last haggle. No, he could not; five tomans was a loss; was not only giving it me, he would do that, but it meant a sacrifice; and so we parted. But just as I was turning from the main bazaar into a side street, somebody tapped me on the arm. I turned round. ‘The scimitar, here it is,’ said he; ‘where is the five tomans?’ It had been a useful little experience in Persian trading. As a matter of fact, it is always necessary to divide by at least three, and sometimes as much as five, in order to ascertain in a commercial transaction what should be given. After this preliminary proceeding all that is necessary to conclude a bargain, which at all events will not result in an extravagant swindle, is time and patience.

Engaged in such processes on a greater or smaller scale the mob jostles and jabbers on. Here is a violent altercation, probably about a question of a penny-farthing or some such sum. There a calm and quiet matching of wills between two courteous individuals, upon which may probably depend a considerably

larger amount. While we are watching, suddenly a furry head bobs into us behind, and we are nearly knocked over by a great package strapped on a lusty mule. There is no 'by your leave'; you must get out of the way if you do not want to be knocked over. You must take care of yourself if you are to be taken care of at all. Farther or nearer, as the case may be, there arises the din of the copper-smiths' bazaar, and everywhere there is the confused buzz of voices, streaked here and there with shouts and rough oaths; it is a kaleidoscope of sound. The air is filled with spices and scents and the odour of humanity; it seems to have a veritable consistency of its own, and to hang like some sort of all-enveloping medium full of smell and noise. Even the light itself can scarcely penetrate this resistant atmosphere. The corners are black with a solidity of darkness, and even the sunshine, which streams through the little windows in the vaulted roof, has to force its way through the teeming air in shafts of light along which dance a multitude of motes. The East, if it does not trade well, trades at least vehemently.

Leading off this great central artery with its throbbing tide of life, there are the broad caravan-serais to which constantly come in, and in which abide during their stay, the caravans of the merchants. Here, too, around the central square are shops, and always in particular, one shop,—'the' shop. Every one who has ever lived in a country village knows 'the' shop. It contains everything; you can buy bootlaces, matches, and lucky-bags, and cheeses; they bake bread and mend boots, and if you like they will come and put the pump right when it goes wrong. The Eastern parallel to this is 'the' shop in a caravanserai. It is the furnishing place for the native

traveller, and he can get there all that goes to make a journey possible and pleasant. There he can obtain clothes, biscuits, tinned fruits, all varieties of food and raiment;—all, let it be remarked, fairly bad and generally extremely dear (*e.g.*, two shillings for a small tin of biscuits). The tinned fruits have a tendency to be what is left over from somebody else's stock of several years ago. The clothes, though to outward appearances satisfying anyone who is not unreasonably fastidious as to 'cut,' will suddenly, when the traveller is at a safe distance from 'the' shop, display startling and unsuspected weaknesses. But that is the traveller's business, and after all 'the' shop is a great convenience. I should, however, recommend the English traveller to go elsewhere, when he can.

Now for the great glory of Shiraz—its gardens.

The garden of a great city differs from its rural neighbours in that it is less wild and more pretentious. There is generally in the centre a 'summer-house'; not a mere wooden shanty overgrown with creepers, but a solid stone edifice which literally takes the place of a house in the summer, and in which, during the hot months, it is possible to live coolly and comfortably. This summer-house consists generally of a large central hall flanked by smaller apartments. In the centre of the hall itself, there will likely enough be a clear pool of water, and possibly, if the owner is more than usually luxurious, a playing fountain. Here, propped on cushions and surrounded with the various modern adjuncts which correspond to Omar's book of verses and other paraphernalia, shaded from the heat of the midday sun and soothed by the murmuring of running water, it is no doubt possible to successfully cope with the various discomforts with which the summer in Eastern climates is associated.

Outside, the paths are more trimly kept, and the trees are allowed to run less luxuriantly wild than in the garden we have already visited. Primness, however, thank goodness, would be an impossibility to the Persian temperament, and even the town-bred garden is a delightfully untamed and unkempt thing.

Such a garden is, of course, left a place of pleasant seclusion for its owner. But this is not the case with the more historic gardens of Shiraz. I remember going to a little place called Chehel Tan, the Garden of the Forty Bodies. It takes its name from the forty little unlettered stone slabs, which are arrayed down one side close under the wall, and which mark the resting-places of as many men, whom, so tradition says, were murdered and buried here. Now it has become a kind of tea-garden—the Persian has a taste for taking his pleasures among the dead, which well accords with his somewhat morbid temperament, and is quite consonant with his habit of introducing a strain of religious philosophy into all the doings of his everyday life. And so it comes about that, as in this case, he frequently converts a cemetery into a place of entertainment for himself and his friends, and as a tea-table the top of a tombstone is found as appropriate to the living as, in another capacity, it is to the dead.

‘In the midst of life we are in death,’ says the Persian. Sometimes, indeed, he goes so far as to build his ‘tomb’ during his own life, surround it with a garden, and pass his declining days in the contemplation of his last resting-place. To the mind that is capable of forgetting that it matters no more after death what becomes of the body than it does what happens to any other inanimate piece of earth, there is

something rather attractive in this preliminary getting used to a dwelling-place for eternity.

To an enemy, however, this gives an obvious opening for an unpleasant remark, which was not neglected by a certain acquaintance of a great but unpopular man. After he had constructed a really magnificent tomb for himself, and entertained largely therein, he was much annoyed to receive from some ill-mannered persons a note which said : ' You may be assured that the city appreciates the work which you have done in making your magnificent mausoleum. All that is now wanting to complete the good work is your decease.'

The scene in our tiny garden, for it is very small, is a picturesque one. Entering through a little gate in the wall, we come into a square plot planted with cypress-trees, and surrounded with a high wall, over which peep the tops of the outside trees, backed by an undulating horizon of barren hills. There are not only cypresses, although they are the most prominent feature, as, indeed, they must be wherever they exist. There are tall firs and little scrubby bushes, and the whole profusion of foliage casts a twinkling shimmer of shadow and light over the paths and walls and flower-beds. At the far end the wall is elaborated into a series of little recessed rooms, raised a few feet above the level of the ground like those in a caravan-serai. These small stage-like places are tea-shops and smoking-dens. Inside they are panelled round with faded frescoes of absurd-looking monarchs (or perhaps, after all, they may be mere ordinary men, though the Persian imagination would certainly convert them into monarchs in a few years even if they were). Round about squat little groups of Persians sipping tea out of tiny glass cups or bubbling away at Kalias. In a

corner is a little group smoking opium. Grave, sober-looking Persians in their drab clothing and black hats, they stand out in excellent contrast to the more vivid colouring of Nature, while the white turban of a Seyid strikes here and there a sharp note in the harmony of colour. The clear air and the brilliant sunlight make the whole an effective picture painted with all the incisive colouring of the East. Away to the right underneath the wall stretch the forty little graves, two long rows of smooth tombstones with, at the end, a Sheik's grave. Evidently he was a very holy man, for at the foot of the stone stands a cheap-looking lantern, which is the sign of especial adoration in the East. The stone is broken in the centre, and the sides have split away. It is a very crumbling remnant of a thing, but in Persia, as, indeed, in certain other climes, the more crumbling a remnant is, the more it acquires sanctity;—often, indeed, its state of honourable decay is its chief, and sometimes its sole, claim to respect. In this case there is added evidence that such respect is at all events here paid, for overshadowing the tomb is a curious object. A barren, dead-looking tree grows almost out of the grave itself, and, standing sentinel-like over the dead Sheik, presents a peculiar appearance. Its withered branches are clad not by Nature, but by man, for each is hung with countless small fragments of rag, till the lower part of the tree looks as though it had become covered with a strange sort of icicles. When I saw all this, I had a peculiar feeling of having seen the same thing before. That is a feeling which often comes without apparently any substantial reason, unless, as some say, one half of our brain is just a fraction of a second in front of the other, which thereupon welcomes the sensation of the moment as an old acquaintance. This time, however, there

was a more solid reason for my impression, for it suddenly flashed on my mind that close to my home in Wales I had seen practically the identical tree. Just under a hedge in a green corner of a meadow there is a deep icy-cold pool, rudely walled round with stone, and called 'The Well in the Pig's Field.' There is a tradition that those bathing in this pool will be freed of various ills, the one thing necessary besides the bathe being the tying up of a small rag on the branches of the tree which overshadows the water. Thus it happens that at the present day the tree over 'The Well in the Pig's Field' is hung with a motley array of rags, just as is this little tree so many thousand miles away in the garden of the Forty Bodies at Shiraz. So are we mortals much the same on this little world of ours, be it East or West or North or South. So does humanity differ in degree rather than in substance.

There is a pathetic power about the thought of home to a traveller in a distant land, and as I gave a coin to the beggar by the grave and went from the garden, my eyes saw not the grey and brown and black of a Persian garden, but the soft green of a little field in Wales.

The same day we went to the tomb of Hafiz. It has been often described;—the marble stone beautifully carved, enclosed within a kind of cage of iron bars, at the corners of which fly horrible iron pennons. The whole of this affair is inside a square cemetery packed with the graves of those who wished to be buried 'under the shadow' of the great man. Entering the iron cage, we gazed on the stone, in the centre of which stood a common-looking candlestick. It is not the original tombstone,—that is just without the building on the side farthest from the door,—but it is,

nevertheless, a finely carved slab covered with an inscription of the poet's verses. Somehow it did not strike me as quite impressive enough ; the surroundings were not worthy of the hero of Persian poetry. Personally, I prefer to think of Omar's grave overshadowed by the wild rose-tree, though, alas ! even that delightfully romantic tradition has, I believe, now been ruthlessly made havoc of. Over beyond the gate, close under the cemetery wall, was a little altar covered with a red cloth and decked with tiers of shining candlesticks, the candles burning even on the brightest day. Round this knelt in prayer some half-dozen women in their all-enveloping black gowns, divided in front with the long white slips, and ending in the little cotton lattice-work openings over the eyes. Very leper-like and unpleasant they looked. Sick people they were, and soon they huddled together before the mullah, had something pronounced over them, and then departed.

Far more fitting is the tomb of Saadi. Close by Dilkhusa—'The Garden of Hearts' Delight'—the valley to the north-east opens out, and there in the centre, set in the midst of the great barren hills, is the little garden, with its fir-trees, dark cypresses, and white buildings, which marks the poet's resting-place. Never in my life have I seen a place more perfectly suited to its object or in more harmonious surroundings. There, surely, he can rest in peace, close to his beloved city, away from the bustle and change, reposing in his quiet little garden amid the hills. Inside, in a small chamber, just off the peaceful plot of verdure, surrounded with its high white walls, is the tomb itself. Within a bare lattice-windowed room, peeping into which the sunlight traces a pattern on the clean-swept floor, there rises a simple blue



SAADI'S TOMB.

railing round a block of marble chiselled with a few immortal verses. That is all.

But outside there are things which, perhaps, even more beautifully keep the poet's memory green.

Just behind, and to the north of the garden, there suddenly appears an opening in the earth, from which steps lead down into a little subterranean passage, which ends in a tiny rock chamber, open above to the heavens. From the north side there bubbles out a spring, to form a crystal pool, straight into which there lead some rude stone steps. Passing through this little pool, the water babbles away beneath the rock opposite. Numberless little fish, once held sacred to Saadi, dart to and fro in the limpid waters, while at the bottom of the steps you may chance on a group of Persian girls filling water-skins with a pretty splashing and chattering. Behind, the worn grey steps lead to a blaze of blue sky and sunlight; below, flows the clear lucent stream; above, rise the well's stone walls clean into a patch of heaven. It all forms a sweet little scene, somehow more fitly reminiscent of the Persian poet than the chill slab of marble over his dust.

Not far away is another very different well. It is high on the mountain that overhangs Saadi's tomb, and I climbed there one splendid afternoon. After a long struggle up steep, grassy slopes, and little winding paths, I reached the summit of the hill-crest. A glorious picture of the plain of Shiraz lay before me, grandest, perhaps, to the south-west, where above the sea of salt, now a splendid blue, rose purple mountains flecked with shadow and sun, lost in tier upon tier of woolly grey and white clouds, sped by the south wind, which caught my face as I came over the ruin-clad slopes;—and there below me, in a little hollow, was

the well. It was a great oblong, clean-cut chasm, descending into gloomy depths, only fathomed by the pigeons, which made weird, thunderous noises in its abyss. Grim it looked, and grim was its history. No one has ever been able to sound its depths. From earliest times the traveller has tried, but, in spite of all his efforts, the matter is still unsolved. Cornelius le Bruyn, indeed, in 1704, with admirable nicety, fixed its depths at 429 feet and 11 inches; but his minute accuracy is disputed by every one else who has made any attempt at measurement. Dr. Wills much more recently was unable to find the bottom at 600 yards. Such is the well, and its uses have been as dreadful as its depth is mysterious; for down this unfathomable chasm, until quite recently, used to be thrown the faithless wives of Shiraz. Looking about, I found some stones, and, leaning over, hurled them into the black void. I heard the hollow noises gradually die away for over thirty seconds, but at the end there was no splash or heavy echo to announce the coming to rest of my envoys. As I lay flat on my face, peering down into the fearsome pit, and heard the distant rumblings from below, a shudder passed over me at the thought of the bodies which had cleft those depths and roused those echoes. From the very stone upon which I lay they had been cast; this slab of white rock was their last step to eternity. I pictured some poor thing urged, quivering and shrinking, over the brink;—the breathless drop, then a horrid crash and a cry;—silence;—then, further away, a dull thud;—a long pause;—afterwards a crescendo of multitudinous reverberations from below;—at last a dull mumbling far beneath, dying into a long, dark silence.

I drew back and went away from the place with a

cold feeling at my heart, thinking of what my missiles had reached at the end of their journey.

In these days, when the enfranchisement of woman is an accomplished fact in many of our colonies, and a thing of the not distant future even in this conservative land, it is painful and even difficult to imagine the ~~bondage~~ that still holds the sex in Eastern lands. In the West itself, there is still, unfortunately, a somewhat prevalent feeling that woman is some sort of superior domestic animal; but we have, at all events, as George Meredith puts it, 'rounded Seraglio Point,' even if we have not, 'doubled Cape Turk.' In the country in which I was travelling they are still the far side even of Seraglio Point, and a woman is looked upon as a mere chattel, a thing specially invented for man's amusement and to beget and take care of his children;—something with only half a soul and no claims to recognition at all, except those she can enforce by virtue of her cunning or her attractions. They pay their own penalty for it, the race suffers; but, unfortunately, the more the race suffers, the less likely is it to arrive at any more desirable state of affairs. At present, indeed, her lot is little, if at all, preferable to that of a dumb animal, except that, if she is tolerably well favoured, she will undoubtedly escape any actual ill-treatment, and may, by her blandishments, even obtain considerable power. By the very religion of the country, however, she is doomed to a perpetual position of inferiority. On earth she is established as man's plaything from the very fact that there is permitted a plurality of wives, while even in heaven, however virtuous and long-suffering she may have been in this world, the imagination of the Persian has only credited her with half the rewards to be attained by the most mediocre man, who just

manages to scrape into a happy hereafter. In Persia and in the Persian paradise alike a woman is indeed considered half-price.

To return to our gardens ; one of the most delightful visits I paid while at Shiraz was to a little place set high up in the hills behind the city. It was called the Well of Baba Kuhi—Baba of the Hill—and it was a weary and a hot climb to reach the tiny pool and rude hut where once lived, or is said to have lived, the old hermit who gave his name to the spot. On the way I was regaled with a story so admirably Persian in character that it shall be here put down.

In Persia, the first word which the traveller learns is 'Insh'allah.' 'Insh'allah' means 'If God is willing,' and it is interjected on every possible occasion by the average Persian, indicating almost equally his habit of introducing religion into everything, and his national characteristic of unreliability and indefiniteness. The Persian will never commit himself, not, at least, while there is anyone else who can be committed instead, and if he can throw the responsibility for a statement or a promise upon a Creator to whom appeal on this earth is impossible, he is only too happy to do so.

The occasion of my being told the excuse which the Persian has invented for this practice of hedging everything about with 'If God is willing' was a question I put as to whether we should arrive at the well of Baba Kuhi before the sun had sunk too low to allow of my photographing the place. With a religious uncertainty came the answer, 'Insh'allah, we shall be there in time.' 'You Persians use too much Insh'allah,' says Saif with his usual abruptness and customary contempt for foreigners. Whereupon we are favoured with a story of Insh'allah.

It would seem that on the day of creation (to the Persian there is nothing like founding his argument as far back as possible, adding, as this does, to its weight and detracting from its liability to contradiction) the newly feathered birds had not yet tried their wings. Apparently it was getting late in the day, and ~~at a~~ council they resolved (it is obvious that the creation took place in Persia) to put off the experiment till the next morning; so they all went to bed (a cheerless proceeding, presumably, since there had scarcely been time for them to prepare a comfortable nest), and as they went, they murmured, 'Insh'allah, we will fly to-morrow' ('We will fly to-morrow, if God is willing'). All, that is, except the cock and the hen, who, either from mere impertinence or else from sheer haste to get to bed, omitted their Insh'allah, only murmuring with assurance, 'We will fly to-morrow.' This, the Persians assert, the Creator unfortunately overheard, and thus it happened that next day, when, at the eventful moment, all the birds soared into the air, the poor cock and hen were left feebly flapping their futile wings, unable to raise themselves more than a few inches from the ground. So now everything is hedged about with Insh'allah, to avoid, so says the Persian, again provoking another lesson in proper humility.

Every evening a curious performance is gone through in Shiraz. The scene is the courtyard of the Governor's palace in the city, a bare, open space surrounded with gloomy-looking walls; the end of the day is at hand, and the still dusk is settling over plain and hill. Suddenly, at the precise hour of sunset, there arises from one of the towers which overlook the square a weird and very Oriental din. It is the Persian 'band' playing-down the sun. With a wild tom-tomming

and a rhythmic, and, to a Western ear, a discordant, concert of trumpeting and whistlings, they herald the departure of daylight.

It was the same in 1787. Franklin says: 'Opposite to the citadel in a large handsome square is a gallery where the Khan's music, consisting of trumpets, kettle drums, and other instruments, plays regularly at sunrise and sunset.' There they are,—the three kettle-drums; the trumpet, which has two notes and resembles a coach-horn in appearance; and the 'other instrument,' a whistle, from which the performer extracts a series of intermittent scales;—banging and blowing just as they did a hundred and sixteen years ago, when the shrill runs, punctuated by the hoarse blasts from the trumpet and accompanied by the incessant roll of the kettle-drums, beat upon the ears of that traveller who leaves an account of his 'tour' from Bushire, which might serve as a guide to the traveller of to-day—such is the rate of progress in this Eastern land.

CHAPTER X

BY MARSH AND MOUNTAIN

‘ We
Are mere usurpers, tyrants, and what’s worse,
To fright the animals and to kill them up
In their assign’d and native dwelling-place.’

SHAKESPEARE :

As You Like It, Act II., Scene ii.

It is not only the poet and the artist who can indulge their tastes in Shiraz. The sportsman will find that the plain in which the city is set and the mountains which surround it afford him abundant hunting-grounds. Geese and duck are plentiful; the wily snipe, who, perhaps, can test his skill best of all, will almost embarrass him by their numbers, while, if he despises such small prey, he may take his rifle and stalk the ibex, moufflon, and even leopard, or, with a pony and a spear, ride after the wild boar.

My journey, being undertaken in the true spirit of travel, was concerned, not only with seeing things, but doing them, and I had come prepared to make use of any opportunities of sport which might present themselves. On several occasions I was fortunate enough to find myself with a companion shooting small game among the marshes, while by the courtesy of a Persian friend I was able at Shiraz to indulge also in the pursuit, if not in the capture, of larger beasts.

One day in particular proved fertile in incident ;— but I will let my diary speak for itself :

‘ I awake this morning to find it just seven, and, despite my minute instructions the night before concerning an early start, there is not a soul about.

‘ After sallying forth into the morning air to make a chilly attempt at summoning the servants, I give it up, leap into an icy cold tub, and, dragging my clothes from various hiding-places, eventually find myself ready to start.

‘ At last a servant ! I strain my Persian vocabulary to its utmost, and eventually manage to make it clear that he is to send on everything to my friend’s house. Then my own pony comes round, and I set out. To-day I have brought some number “ fours ” for duck, some “ eights ” for snipe, and a rifle for anything large that may turn up, for the possibilities of these parts are delightfully uncertain.

‘ It is a glorious morning. A white frost picks out the landscape in glistening brightness as the dawn breaks in the south-east. In the heaven there hangs a long, rippling sheet of crimson clouds, like wave-marked sands of the sky, glowing with a splendid radiance over the still purple hills. The air is keen and exhilarating ; it nips with a pleasant, playful little bite,—not the cruel gnaw of a black winter’s day, but just sheer good spirits which will sober down later into a steady warmth. I feel that it is good to be alive—to breathe—to move—and apparently my pony feels as happy as I do, for he caracoles about as we wind through the slippery, cobble-stone alleys and thread the winding maze of bazaars out on to the broad plain beyond.

‘ Across this plain we wend our way past curious deep clay-pits and close to little gardens with their

slender cypress-trees and white birches. On and on, until over a long bare ridge we sight, beyond a dark mass of gardens in the valley beneath, the gleam of water. There lie our hunting-fields, and after a plod down the stone-strewn slopes we find in one of the gardens a little house, the summer resort of some Persian grandee. Inside, there is the welcome sight of a table spread with a white cloth, whereon are set eggs, tea, and the brown Persian bread called *sangek*. (This *sangek* is a flat, indented sheet of brown-papery-looking substance. It derives its name from *sang*, a small stone, for it is baked on tiny pebbles, one of which occasionally appears in the bread itself, to the eater's discomfort and surprise.)

'After a hearty attack on the food, we buckle on our cartridge-bags and, accompanied by a Persian apiece, set off across the heathy plain for the gleam that we spied far off.

'Game is already in evidence; a fine duck gets up out of shot, and immediately afterwards we put up a greyish nondescript bird. I have never seen an animal of this kind before, so I uncertainly raise my gun to my shoulder and then drop it. My friend is apparently equally ignorant of the nature of the bird, for he, too, lets it fly out of range without a shot. We turn to our Persian and ask what it is. He tells us it is a bustard! Another missed opportunity! However, it has gone, and it is no good crying after lost bustards, and so we plod away until we come to some little marshy streamlets. Here we both take our different paths, and at last—*sca-a-a*, and the little brown bird flits away on its zigzag course, too far ahead, alas! for a shot. However, this is encouraging, and from my right comes a sound of heavy firing, showing that my friend at all events is having sport. I press on in-

spirited. The sun glints up from the water as I splash through the mud and marsh, and soon once again comes the harsh little noise, and another snipe gets up. I have struck some good country now. Plenty of others follow the first two, either into the distance or into the bag which my Persian carries, and my attention is soon very fully engaged. In fact, I am feeling fairly happy when I enter a long, shallow strip of marsh about thirty yards wide and thick with reeds. I have just dropped a snipe, which has sunk struggling into a bed of reeds behind, and another zigzags out of shot and settles in a little patch some way up the *nullah* I have described. I mark the place, and approach cautiously along a green island of sedgy turf which runs up the middle of the marshy creek. Here are the reeds into which he went; now only a few more steps and he ought to—*gr-ou-ff-gr-unt-unt*, and, with a prodigious snorting and grunting and splashing, there hurtles out of the green bed five yards in front—not my snipe, but a black mass, an impression of little twinkling eyes, a broad snout, and angry black bristles,—a wild boar. He comes straight for me, and my heart gives a sudden bound; curious thoughts flash through my brain in an infinitesimal space of time: “Firing will only provoke him—I have nothing but snipe-shot;” then, “He is coming at me, anyhow—he can’t very well be more provoked than he is.” All this while I snatch my gun to my shoulder, and even before I empty, one after the other, both barrels straight into his face, and then hit out blindly at him with my empty gun.

‘It is all over before I have really comprehended anything, and I find myself lying on my back in the marsh, with a vision of the beast flashing by, strange sounds in my ears, and a thankful realization that he has not

wounded me with his tusks. My first thought is of my assailant. "*Tufang, tufang!*" ("My rifle, my rifle!") I shout to the Persian who comes rushing up and thrusts it into my hand,—not very steady, I fear, at this moment. The low bank of the *nullah* prevents my kneeling to get a shot, so, standing up, I send a Mauser bullet whizzing after the boar, by now a couple of hundred yards away. Whiff,—a little puff of dust rises just beyond him. I hastily eject the cartridge and send another shot, to raise another little puff of dust just to his right. A third—and there is no dust—only a dull thud, and he staggers a little. Then he recovers, and blunders on out of shot towards the marshes to the east. After him we go, tracking his course by scattered patches of blood on the brown sand, till, alas! they lead straight into the dense depth of a great field of high reeds. To pursue a wounded boar into his lair in such a spot would be, not only stupid, but very probably futile, so we abandon the chase, and I at last pause to scrape off the mud with which I am plentifully covered.

‘Whether my snipe-shot at close quarters turned the boar sufficiently from his course to prevent him hurting me, or whether he was as much startled as I was, and only knocked me over in his attempt to get away, I do not know; but I register a vow that next time I go shooting a boar it shall not be with number “eight” shot if I can help it.

‘Now, on a small pool ahead, I see little black forms moving about;—geese. I dumbly curse myself for not bringing some number “two” shot, thrust a couple of “fours” into the barrels of my gun, and, worming along flat on my face, manage to get within fifty yards, when, flapping, screeching, and splashing, up they get. I loose off both barrels with about as much effect as if I had used a pea-shooter. Con-

found them! sailing away in a beautiful V to the south.

‘It is time to retrace my steps, and to make my way from the deeper waters to which I have penetrated, back to the shallow snipe marshes and my friend. It is blowing almost a gale by this time;—a clean, cutting wind, down which the wild snipe come like feathers blown hither and thither. My companion tries a little corner just under the mountain, while I crouch in the rushes to get a shot at the birds he puts up as they come madly down the gale. It is good sport, but unremunerative, so at last we turn back, when things become more exciting. It is an ideal spot; soft tufts of grass dotted about among oozy mud and short reeds. Here and there the glint of water, and everywhere the dainty little birds with the long slender bills rising from the green patches and boring into the heart of the wind. The labour of splashing through the swamp is forgotten; distance is nothing; the mind only cares for the gleam of the barrels, the sparkle of the water, the continual breathless expectation of a little brown bird appearing and zigzagging away. We splash on and on until at last, alas! there comes the end,—a tapering away of the beautiful mud into odious solid ground.

‘Further on there is another bit of evil-smelling, sulphurous marsh, with a sickly green scum on the top of the little pools of water. But the birds like it none the less, and what is good enough for them is good enough for me.

‘At length the day’s shooting is finished, and I am left with a long plod over dry land whitened with a deposit of sulphur. The excitement of the last few hours falls away like a garment, and there takes its place a calm content in the peaceful wonders of

nature. It comes almost as a relief; it seems somehow better than the late mad exhilaration. There is a feeling that there is something finer in the world than the mere lust of excitement and the joy of triumphant endeavour. Peace, after all, is better than passion, however full of zest that passion may be. Peace is the good end of everything.

‘Tired with the day, I give myself up to the sunset scene;—the wind has died down, the plain stretches away brown and green to the pink mountains crowned with snow, and the glorious air, despite the sun’s efforts, is keen, cutting, and crisp.

‘Back at the little garden we find those material comforts without which, alas! on this earth the keenest spiritual delights are often less perfect. We eat, indeed, a very hearty meal before, just as the sun drops behind the hills, we start off on our eight-mile journey home. My pony has cast a shoe, so I take turns at riding one of my servant’s beasts, which labours under the disadvantage of having, instead of a rein, a piece of rope fastened to its nose-band, which only provides for pulling its head to the near side. It is, moreover, an uncomfortable experience to have to sit astride the article termed a *khurzin*, which consists of two large saddle-bags stuffed to-day with a confused mass of boots, clothes, crockery, etc. Still, I ride a couple of miles and walk the other six;—walking, at all events, keeps the cold out.

‘The moon is up, and we pass through a ghostly land of dim, misty distances, with here and there, looming large, a dark garden with its clean black spires of cypress. One of these, “the haunted garden,” bears an evil name and lies deserted, falling into ruins and peopled only by ghosts and robbers. At last appears Shiraz, a city of dim lights overhung

with a white pall of smoke, and then come the little narrow lanes, filled with darkness up to the point where the shadows of the high walls suddenly emerge into radiant moonlight, while in the end there shines from a certain window that red glow so redolent to a weary wanderer of comfort and of home. . . .’

Small game, however, is looked upon by the Persian with a certain amount of contempt; it is the large animal he enjoys pursuing. To-day he adopts various methods of hunting, according to his taste and the quality of the game. He will shoot leopard; stalk ibex; ride, or even course, antelope. He will also say he has shot lion;—but this is not so.

In the old days they would go a-hawking after deer, and Monsieur Tavernier gives us some account of this sport.

‘The king,’ he says, ‘takes great delight to hunt the Boar and Hart; and if it come to pass that the Game out-run the dogs, they then let fly one of their hawkes, who presently seizes the head, and while she is continually pecking, and disturbing the Beast, the Dogs are presently at his heels. The Hawkes are taught to stop like a Horse at full speed: else, they would never quit their prey, which they presently do, as soon as ever the Falconer shews them their reward. Now their way of ord’ring or making the Hawk is this. They take the skin of a Hart, head, body, and legs, and stuff it with straw, to the end it may be like the Beast which they intend to represent in the nature of a Quarry. When they have set it in the place where they usually train up the Hawk, they lay meat upon the head or in the holes of the eyes, to the end the Bird may be sure to seize those parts at his downcome. Being accustomed to feed in this manner for some days together, they fix the Beast upon a Plank

with four Wheels, and cause it to be drawn with long cords by certain men, that mend their pace every day, 'till at length it is drawn by a Horse at full speed, whereby the Bird is accustomed by degrees not to forsake her prey. After the same manner they counterfeit all other sorts of Quarrys to enter their Hawks, as well Wild Boars, wild asses, as Hares and Foxes. Some there are that will order a Crow with the same industry as you would make a Hawk. They have also a certain Beast which they call *Once*, which has a spotted skin like a Tiger, but which is nevertheless very gentle and tame; this a Horseman will carry behind him, and when he sees a wild Goat, he sets down the *Once*, which is so nimble, that in three leaps he will be upon the back of the wild Goat; though the wild Goat be a very swift creature. The *Once* immediately strangles him with his sharp teeth. But if by accident the wild Goat get from him, the *Once* will stand still in the same place abash'd and troubl'd, so that an Infant may take him and kill him, without the least resistance made in his own defence.

'The Kings of Persia take great delight in Hunting, and in that sport it is that they love to shew themselves magnificent: Inasmuch that *Sha-Sefi* desirous to treat all the Ambassadors then at his Court, which at that time were the Tartarian, Muscovite, and Indian, carry'd them along with him into the field, and having tak'n a great number of Harts, Fallow deer, Hinds, and wild Boars, he caus'd them all to be made ready to be eat'n the same day; And while he was feasting, an Architect had order to raise a Pyramid of the heads of those Beasts in the middle of *Ispahan*, of which there are some remains to this day. When the Architect had rais'd it to a considerable height, he came very pleasantly to the King, and told him he

wanted nothing but one head of some great Beast to finish the Work. The King, whether in his wine, or to shew the Ambassadors how absolute he was over his subjects, turning briskly towards the Architect; "Thou say'st well," said he, "nor do I know where to meet with a Head more proper than thy own." Thereupon the miserable Architect was forc'd to submit his own Head, the King's command being presently put in execution.'

My own experience of big game (it would be misleading to call it a 'shoot,' because on this occasion nothing was shot) was an interesting experience of Persian methods and manners, so I will extract it from my diary.

'Shortly after daybreak we set off, attended by a suite of about ten men on horseback, in charge of a very pleasant youth who is an outrider to the illustrious Persian who has so kindly provided us with the facilities for making this expedition.

'All our retinue are armed to the last molar, and they ride horses which answer perfectly to the popular conception of the "Arab steed."

'One of the most delightful characteristics of the Persian is his childlike lightheartedness:—off we go, our followers laughing, joking; now cantering, now galloping wildly,—riding one another off, and scuttering over the most fearful collections of loose stones.

'Just beyond the Isfahan gate, without a word of warning, an amiable lunatic gallops furiously past, unslinging his gun from his shoulder, and as he comes to a little dip in the road two reports and a cloud of smoke explain his conduct. The lazy plover wings away unharmed, but it is all very prettily done and charmingly Persian.

'The dull cloudiness resolves itself into a fine, drift-

ing snow as we follow Hafiz's beloved Ruknabad north, and I am half frozen when, after about eight miles, we halt to allow our mounted beaters to get ahead.

'Just here we have another illustration of the sweet casualness of the native. As the beaters ride off, one is slinging his gun over his shoulder when, half-way there, bang! it empties a charge of shot downwards, luckily into the ground a few feet on my left. A great joke—I can enjoy it now it is over;—but after this I look a little anxiously down the barrels, when, as is frequently the case, I am covered by one or more carelessly swinging firearms.

'We make our way down a precipitous descent, where even the Persian condescends to walk. Far below us is a broad, scrubby plain, where we see those who went ahead of us moving under the distant hills like little toy figures.

'Suddenly they start into violent motion, scud here and there wildly, and gallop along the foot of the mountain. "What is it?" we ask. "Oh, only they have put up an ibex or moufflon, and are riding it!" More fun for them than for us;—they will shoot it if they can; the Persian brings down such beasts with slugs from a shot-gun fired off his horse, thus combining a hunt and shoot in one. We have only rifles to-day, and our horses are not trained to such sport, so we plod tamely on to the far side of the plain, envying our beaters.

'At last a man dismounts and ties his horse to a little bush; this is our first "stop," the end of a line running up into the mountains. After this a horse is left every 200 yards till, by a little *nullah* coming down from the hills, we all dismount and proceed on foot. Along this *nullah* are *sangars*—little shelters of stone 3 feet high, behind which the sports-

man stations himself to await the arrival of the driven game. Leaving a friend and myself at the two lowest ones, our two comrades, the outrider and a Persian pupil-doctor who has joined us and taken command of the expedition, go on further up the rising ground towards the mountain to other posts. I have extracted a bundle from my *khurzin*, and my friend and I hurriedly indulge in eggs and pomegranates,—then retreating behind our little shelters to watch. In front of me I can see a couple of hundred yards; then a rise in the ground obstructs further view.

‘For a quarter of an hour I keep my eyes glued to the skyline of this;—nothing moves, and when I myself try to do so I realize my right leg has decided that this is boring, and has retired to slumber. I cautiously awake it and give the weight of my body to its companion, who evinces as much indisposition to take an interest in things as number one. Still no sign on the ridge in front. I begin to wonder if my hat is very visible over the top of my *sangar*, and, in endeavouring to make sure, run my head into a piece of bush stuck on the top, with a noise which makes my neighbour on the right look round.

‘Confound! my rifle slips down and buries its sight in the earth. After I have dusted the contrary thing there is another uneventful ten minutes, till, in trying to ascertain if my legs are still there, I lie back on part of a pomegranate and ineradicably stain my khaki coat. But no ibex—and the wind is getting colder than ever:—more snow, I suppose. My legs have now apparently departed altogether, and my hands also are on their way, presumably, to find them.

‘Ha! a faint howl in the distance. This enlivens things for quite five minutes, when the old uncomfortable feelings return, and I am just wishing ibex were

in quarters decidedly warmer than my present ones when something really does come over the skyline,—a man on horseback—one of the beaters. I stand up after several efforts, and we collect and ask him what has been seen. “Oh yes, we saw seven ibex” (the usual plan of dividing Persian statements by four does not here produce entirely satisfactory results—but call it two), “and here are two partridges,” bringing forth a couple of beautiful birds, much larger than a partridge; grey-brown, with some little, shot, steel-grey feathers, and in places others striped brown and yellow; a large, hooked, red beak, and red legs. The other visible result of the beat is a cow! They assert that they found a thief in possession, drove him off, and gallantly rescued the fair captive! I dare say there may be thieves about—even nearer than the villains of the heroic story.

‘It is now time to “feed.” Round a corner a fire has been made, and when we arrive a Persian luncheon is produced.

‘This is a most elaborate affair. Tin pans of every shape and size are brought forth and arranged on a large drugget, round which are strewn flat slabs of *sangek* bread as edible napkins. Two immense cauldron-like receptacles hold respectively white and many-coloured rice—*pilau* and *chilau*. The smaller pans contain stewed chicken, lumps of “made-up” meat, preserved quince, preserved citron, etc. Expectations of having to use our fingers for feeding purposes are dispelled by the sight of knives and forks, and we sit down with a sense of our inadequacy to grapple with this immense array of foods.

‘It is evidently the Persian fashion when you have got a fork to use it right along for everything, including selecting, individually, choice morsels from the

dish. (Incidentally, I am glad I have had "first go" at the teapot of water, for I afterwards observed our Persian friend apply the spout to his mouth.) However, it all goes off very well, and afterwards, as they assure us it is no use beating any more, as the ibex won't come out (where from I don't know, but I do not blame them), we set off home, and have a twelve-mile drive through driving rain and a bitter wind, after which tea and a fire are indeed warming to the cockles of our hearts.'

CHAPTER XI

SOME INCIDENTS OF PERSIAN LIFE

‘He that would travel for the entertainment of others should remember that the great object of remark is human life.’—
DR. JOHNSON : *The Idler*, No. 97.

‘CEREMONIES and forms,’ says Malcolm, ‘have and merit consideration in all countries, but particularly among Asiatic nations.’ Certainly it is so in Persia, and Malcolm himself well knew the importance there attached to the strict observance of etiquette. With an adroitness which had much to do with the success of his expeditions, he himself studied, and made his retinue study, the utmost punctiliousness in according their due honours to those whom they met, and in exacting in return those marks of respect to which they were themselves entitled. Little, indeed, impresses the native of any country more than the unexpected knowledge and observance of his customs by a foreigner, and he that would attain his object without friction and with effect will do well to always bear this in mind. It is, of course, possible to gain ends by force, but surely it is better and easier to do so by the fair exercise of courteous skill. He who does in Rome as the Romans do will find paths open to him where others only encounter obstacles.

As to the ceremonies and customs themselves, these differ with every patch of territory and each race of

mankind, all countries being only alike in the apparently immaterial and often absurd character of the observances to which they attach importance. It is as well to remember, especially in a strange land, that, just as one man's meat is another man's poison, so what is considered necessary in one country in another is either laughed at or discountenanced. It seems ridiculous to the Englishman that in Persia, if you present anything to another person, it is polite to do so with both hands rather than with one, and that when, owing to the small size of the object, it cannot conveniently be taken in both hands, it must be presented with one hand, and that hand held with the other. But it is no less ridiculous to the Persian that English ladies and gentlemen should walk in to dinner arm-in-arm, and there is really no more reason in one custom than the other. Just as, moreover, the Englishman may err by ignorance of the custom of Persia, so the Persian comes to grief over that of England. Exalted personages at Teheran have, indeed, been seen, on the occasion of an English dinner-party, walking into the dining-room in a simple and childlike manner hand-in-hand with their partners, while on one occasion a certain Persian gentleman, with reminiscences, it is to be supposed, of a past ball, adopted the pleasant but unusual course of clasping the lady round the waist as he conducted her to dinner. Once, indeed, reason is called in in these matters, the game is up; the only reason for the continued existence of most customs (except that most invalid of all excuses, blind conservative prejudice) is that, while they are pleasantly traditional, they are also harmless,—and this is quite reason enough.

Why in shaking hands do we give the right and never the left hand? Because in those times glorified

by the name of the 'good old days' it was impossible to be certain, unless we had hold of a man's right hand, that he was not going to give us a dig in the ribs with a dagger when he attained sufficiently close quarters. But nowadays no one would dream of their society friends treating them in this manner, and the fashion has no more actual use than that of wearing bows on our shoes, which also was once dictated, not by caprice, but by necessity. No, our customs, like our appendices, have survived their use. They can now be defended by nothing more substantial than taste and tradition, so from our glass house let us not presume to throw stones at others because theirs is a different fashion in conservatories.

Certainly some of the Persian fashions might well be considered an improvement upon our own. What could be more neat and simple than the Persian convention that one cup of tea is served on the guest's arrival and another when his host thinks he has stayed long enough? Such a custom, carried out in the matter-of-fact manner that it is in its native land, would be a godsend in a good many other countries. To reason about such matters has, however, already been pronounced irrational; they must be simply left as ornamentations, decorating to taste the plain masonry of material life.

No more moralizing, then, but only a few instances of the Persian way of life which I happened to have the opportunity of observing for myself while I was in Shiraz.

The first concerns a traditional and peculiar institution called '*bast*.' *Bast* is the system of Sanctuary, familiar in history and actually existent to-day in the East.

There are certain places in Persia in which, when he

has reached them any man, be he rich or poor, noble or shepherd, minister or criminal, is safe, nor can anyone touch him as long as he is under the protection of the sanctuary afforded him by his position. In lands where violence can override the law, the safety of the subject often depends on some such rudimentary institutions.

At the entrance to a mosque there frequently hangs a chain ; this is *bast*. Touching this or past its barrier a man is safe. Other places of *bast* are the guns of the artillery, the tails of the horses belonging to royalty, the telegraph offices, and the above-mentioned precincts of the consulates and legations. It may be noticed that the idea of sanctuary accompanies a respect or reverence for the place therewith invested. A Persian reverences his saints, he respects or fears the European and all his works, such as telegraphs and cannons, and anyone who has been in the East will understand the high opinion in which the Oriental holds the horse. There is something curiously fascinating and savouring of another age about this tradition of *bast* ; but in actual practice, like a great many picturesque institutions, it sometimes becomes slightly inconvenient. On the occasion of my visit to Shiraz the Governor became wrath with one of his subjects, and sent for him in order to cut off his hands. Instead of obeying the command, the wretched man hurriedly fled to the grounds of his British Majesty's representative, whence nothing could dislodge him. This was hardly to be wondered at, since as long as he stayed within the sacred precincts his hands remained on him, while once he ventured outside they would be cut off. The Governor raged impotently, but could do nothing. Oriental tempers, however, though hot, are more passionate than long-lived,—indeed, it may be with

a view of allowing sufficient time for hasty temper to cool that a temporary asylum is always available to the Eastern culprit. In this case, at all events, time brought wiser counsels to the mind of the Governor, and after several days' sojourn our friend was told he could leave his place of *bast* without fearing the loss of his hands. Such is the history of one occasion on which this Persian custom undoubtedly served its purpose.

Another incident which gave me some insight into the manners of the land in which I was travelling was a call I paid upon the Governor from whose wrath the hero of the last story was fugitive.

Before describing the visit, the Governor himself merits attention. In character he was a typical Oriental despot. In a great many instances it is a true saying that the position makes the man, and when the position is one of autocratic sovereignty over those below and occasional oppression from those above, the result is likely to be such a man as is usually found at the head of a province in an Eastern land. Hasty but good-hearted ; violent yet generous ; erratic but, nevertheless, able ; combining the cruelty of a tyrant with the geniality of a good fellow, our Governor displayed many of the characteristics traditionally associated with Haroun-al-Raschid of the 'Arabian Nights.' This hero, indeed, the Governor seemed to have specially set himself up to imitate ; or perhaps he only copied him second-hand from the great Shah Abbas, Haroun-al-Raschid's Persian parallel. There was undoubtedly some similarity between all three. Like the potentate of the 'Arabian Nights,' the Governor of Shiraz took a delight in disguising himself and going incognito about the bazaars, during which expeditions, no doubt, he was able to

profit by many pieces of useful information, including occasional observations about his august self.

Shah Abbas also followed this fashion of becoming acquainted with men and affairs. 'Among the rest of the cunning knacks,' says Tavernier, 'that Shah Abbas made use of, to know how squares went in his Kingdom, without trusting too much to his Ministers, he oft'n disguis'd himself, and went about the City like an ordinary inhabitant, under pretence of buying and selling, making it his business to discover whether Merchants us'd false weights or measures or no. To this intent one evening going out of his Palace in the habit of a Countryman, he went to a Bakers to buy a *Man* of Bread, and thence to a Cook to buy a *Man* of Roast-meat, (a *Man* is six Pound, sixteen Ounces to the Pound). The King having bought his Bargains return'd to Court, where he caus'd the *Athemadoulet* to weigh both the Bread and the Meat exactly. He found the Bread to want fifty-seven Drams, and the Meat forty-three. The King seeing that, fell into a great chafe against three or four of them that were about him, whose business it was to look after those things; but especially against the Governor of the City, whose Belly he had caused to have been ript up, but for the intercession of certain Lords. Besides the reproaches that he threw upon them for being so negligent in their Employments; and for their little affection to the publick good, he laid before them the injustice of false weights; and how sadly the cheat fell upon poor men, who having great Families, and thinking to give them eight hundred Drams of Bread, by that fraud depriv'd them of a hundred and forty-three. Then turning to the Lords that were present, he demanded of them, what sort of justice ought to be done to those people? When none of them daring to

open their mouths, while he was in that passion, he commanded a great Oven to be made in the *Piazza*, together with a Spit long enough to roast a man; and that the Oven should be heated all Night, and that they should make another fire to be kindled hard by the Oven. The next morning the King caus'd the Baker and the Cook to be apprehended, and to be led quite through the City, with two men going before them, who cry'd to the people, We are going to put the Baker into a red-hot Oven made in the *Piazza*, where he is to be bak'd alive, for having utter'd Bread by false weights; and the Cook is to be roasted alive, for having sold meat by false weights. Thus those two men serv'd for an example not only to *Isfahan*, but to all the Kingdom, where every one dreaded the severe justice of *Shah-Abbas*.'

A Persian Governor, indeed, even at this day, is mightily concerned with the prices of commodities in the city over which he is set. He is a kind of 'little father' to the place, and has powers undreamt of in less autocratic lands.

When I was at Shiraz on one occasion all the butchers were flogged in pairs because the price of meat was too high. I believe they protested that sheep were dear, and that therefore they could not sell meat at a low price; whereon the Governor retorted that they had better wait to kill the sheep until they were cheaper again. The main point was, however, that the price of meat came down.

It may have been gathered from some of the incidents and narratives already quoted that where the exercise of punishment is left wholly in the hands of an Eastern autocrat, penalties become peculiar and severe. That is indeed the case. The day I came to Shiraz some thieves were caught, and shortly after-

wards they were punished. In other days the penalties for thieving were more severe than to-day. The old writers mention them with a cold-blooded and matter-of-fact unemotion. 'Thieves find no mercy in Persia,' says Tavernier, 'only they are variously put to death.' He then goes on to mention some of the various methods, such as tying them to camels' tails by the feet, leaving them, buried alive, to starve to death,—in which torment,' he says, 'they will sometimes desire a passenger to cut off their heads, though it be a kindness forbidden by the Law.'

There were other punishments ; but enough has been said to show the type in vogue some time ago. To-day, custom is more merciful ;—our thieves only had their hands cut off. At this operation, the executioner is clothed in red for obvious reasons, and after the ceremony is over, the victims are immediately sent out to their assembled relatives. These have at hand a basin of boiling lard, into which the hand-less stumps are plunged to stop the unfortunate men from bleeding to death.

In the East a good deal depends upon the temper of the Governor at the moment a criminal is brought in to be sentenced. One man may have his hands cut off, while the next, for precisely the same offence, may only be bastinadoed or ham-strung. An outburst of severe punishment has apparently the same calming effect upon a hasty temper as a dose of cooling medicine ; and happy is the criminal who comes at the end of a long list. There seems to be no recognized principle underlying the whole system ;—while the punishment for stealing is such as has been described, murder may be atoned for, occasionally, by a payment to the dead man's relatives. Lapses of morality are severely dealt with, and it is only a little

over a hundred years ago that Tavernier describes how, while he was at Shiraz, the Governor had a fair culprit 'torn to pieces by his doggs which he keeps a purpose for such chasftifements.'

Nowadays things are better; but the Governor is still an autocrat, possessing for his citizens fearful and uncertain potentialities, and it was with no small interest that I looked forward to an interview with our modern Haroun-al-Raschid.

A Persian interview is a matter of strict ceremony. It has to be conducted in becoming garments and with a becoming grace. Even if you have no top-hat, you must wear a frock-coat, and, if you ride, it is a mark of your own importance and of respect to your host to approach his residence as slowly as possible; for the more deliberately you go in Persia, the more noble you are supposed to be.

During conversation with the Governor it is necessary to scrupulously observe certain forms of speech. Your title and his title must be correctly and frequently used. He will be, perhaps, 'Hazarat-i-ali,'—'your high mightiness'; you, 'Bandeh-i-shuma,'—'your slave.' The interview will begin with the stereotyped Mahometan greeting, 'Peace be with thee,' in Arabic, and after that 'your slave' must wait for 'your high mightiness's' next remark, which will be an inquiry as to 'your slave's' health. You will then retort, 'The health of your slave, thanks to the presence of your high mightiness, is very good. The health of your high mightiness, please Allah, is also very good?' 'Your slave' will then be bidden to sit, and conversation will begin, during which it is necessary to constantly remember that you are a slave and that he is a high mightiness. After two cups of tea, neither more nor less, since the second is a signal for

departure, you may go; but before you do so, it is necessary to inquire, 'Does your high mightiness enjoin permission to depart?' Then, the desired permission being afforded, you remark, 'Your slave has given much trouble,' which he will politely disclaim. After that, all that is left to say before actually getting off the premises is, 'Your slave has been highly honoured.' Such are the rules of the game.

According, then, to the custom of the country, we reined our horses in on the occasion of our visit to the Governor as soon as we got to the courtyard, and in our subsequent advance we should have been easily beaten by a funeral. Eventually, however, we arrived at the gateway, where we were met by some rather dowdy-looking officials, two men with silver maces, and two Persian cossacks. After wandering through really delightful gardens, dotted with pools of water, patches of undergrowth, and beds of cabbages, and passing by walls sculptured in the reign of Kerim-Khan with ferocious Persian grandees depicted in colours, we penetrated through little undersized doorways and passages (one of which had an iron door like that of a safe, in case of emergency) to a flight of steps, where we were left by our escort, and, lonely, faced the lion in his den.

A Persian room is much like an English one, save in some minor details. There is nearly always an array of pictures on the walls, and if the Persian taste runs to cheap knick-knacks instead of works of art and objects which appeal to our taste, it must be remembered that the Persian has travelled slowly on the path over which we have long been hurrying. One thing which will often strike the foreigner as he enters a Persian living-room will be a number of little

heaps of bolsters in odd corners and recesses. These are beds; for it frequently happens that the drawing-room is also a dining-room and bedroom in addition to its more regular duties. There will inevitably be a luxuriant carpet underfoot, a rather necessary luxury when it is remembered that it has to be slept on.

The particular room I entered was filled with a dim twilight, in which for the moment I was unable to distinguish anything. Then I saw that from a settle by the fire a rather dowdily-dressed person had come forward. My companion made for him with words of welcome. This, then, was his highness, the autocrat of Shiraz.

As always in these Mahometan lands, his attire showed no signs of magnificence. From head to foot he was clothed in sombre cloth. In face and figure he was a plump, good-looking man with the usual heavy moustache. On his head he wore a black astrachan hat (hats in Persia are worn indoors and out); then came a far from smart, brownish-green coat; European trousers, by no means in their first youth; and, lastly, the elastic-sided boots, commonly known, I believe, as 'Jemimas.'

I confess that the prospect of sustaining a conversation, or anything approaching a conversation, under the conditions I have described had filled me with a certain amount of apprehension. But as a matter of fact it was not nearly so dreadful as it seemed likely to be.

His highness came forward with a smile, and I had been introduced, had murmured my introductory series of remarks, and had been waved graciously to a seat before realizing things had commenced at all.

The conversation which followed, thanks to the assistance of my friend, passed off without a hitch.

I could only catch a few of the Governor's remarks, but the rest were translated for my benefit, and the occasional attempt I made at interpolating an answer on my own appeared to please and amuse his highness. I remember we talked about the Army, and the Governor remarked that he went into the army when he was ten (in what capacity I cannot imagine), and that his admiration for the service was very great, 'since politics, indeed, needed brains, but the army brains plus bodily powers.' This gave me something to think about—afterwards; I was too busy keeping my end up in the conversation to do any thinking at the time. After a typical Persian exchange of the most flowery compliments, I congratulated him on the garden, Shiraz generally, its climate, its ruler, etc., all of which seemed to please him, so that when we rose to go (I actually remembered to ask permission!) it was difficult to recognize in the beaming person before us the man who sliced off people's hands and battered the soles of their feet.

The concluding conversational ceremonies were successfully negotiated, and we at last tore ourselves away, feeling, I am glad to say, none the worse for the cups of tea, the attar-of-rose-perfumed coffee, and the Russian cigarettes which we had had to consume.

What struck me most about the interview was the simplicity and directness of the Governor. His unostentatious manner and appearance, the absence of all pomp and ceremony (I remember he smoked a plain earthenware Kalia), all came as a surprise after the ideas of Oriental magnificence and arrogance which somehow or another are inbred in most English minds. Autocratic our friend undoubtedly was, as a spoilt and high-spirited child might be autocratic; but there was a sturdy simplicity about him which at once dismissed

any comparison with a pampered child. He was, in fact, a strong and, I should say, an able man who filled his place well, and, according to Oriental notions, was an excellent ruler.

In connexion with the subject of crime and punishment and the powers that be in Persia, there will always live in my mind a curious dramatic scene which I witnessed at Shiraz. It took place in the courtyard before the Governor's palace. The sun was just dropping behind the roofs opposite, and a little stone-banked lake, a mere patch of water under a tree before the main gate into the palace, lay sparkling in the last light of day. Close by this little pool a knot of men was gathered as I rode up. For a moment the reason was not clear. Then I caught a glimpse there on the ground of a white-sheeted thing lying upon something of a stretcher. I walked up ;—yes, it was a dead body wrapped in blood-stained white cloth. At its foot stood a Persian, shouting something hoarsely ; his brown clothes were dabbled in red. It was a murder. That was all I could make out. Then from opposite there came a wild crying, and there rushed across the empty square a body of black-veiled women, headed by one who madly dashed on with leaps and bounds, shrieking horribly and beating her bare breasts with her hands. Down on the dead body she fell, patting it and clasping it, moaning and calling to it, then falling back to strike herself again and call vainly to the unhearing heavens.

Suddenly there came the clatter of hoofs ; all fell back ;—it was the Governor. Cossacks, silver maces, then the unpretentious-looking man on a white pony, less remarkable in appearance than all his attendant crowd.

The scene was a moving one. It was profoundly,

almost sensationally, dramatic. It seemed like some situation of the stage. Surely here, to round off the drama, there must come some act befitting the elements of life and death which here lay bare in all their crude nakedness. The atmosphere was electric with a peculiar breathless excitement which seemed to cry for some great thing to happen and relieve the pent-up forces. But, alas! Nature is not so clever as Art; the appropriate rarely happens. The threads are left hanging loosely in the plays of life where they are deftly gathered up in the plays of man. Comedy, tragedy, farce, drama, they all seem to wander on in a slovenly and unending way in this world of ours, without apt justice or a fitting end. There is no plot, no picturesque consecution, no climax. The characters come and go, unregarding art and reason alike. A super lingers on the stage after the principal has been snatched behind the scenes; the wicked triumph without even the palliation of skill to make their triumph tolerable; the stupid 'succeed,' the clever 'fail'; there is no meaning, no moral, in it all; yet still across the stage during their short act the countless players press on aimlessly, eternally. All that most of them can do is to act their small part in the great play that has no beginning, no end, and of which they know no object, seeking not effect, not even justice,—merely striving on in their unimportant places. To do the best, that is indeed all that is to be done,—save, perhaps, now and then to wonder whether, after all, there may not be somewhere a Stage Manager.

So my tragedy came to no fitting end.

The Governor stopped; with a gesture he summoned one of his Court. He was angry; it was unbecoming, unpleasant, to trouble him with such

unsavoury things. What business had they there? 'What is all this?' he asked, pointing angrily to the scene before him. They told him; the husband of this woman had been robbed and shot, that was all. 'Send them away,' said he, and, turning, walked into the palace.

So the body was carried off, as also the woman, for she had fainted. Justice, however, had its way in the end, for I heard that afterwards the murderer was blown from a cannon.

CHAPTER XII

THE ROAD AGAIN

‘There’s a bower of roses by Bendemeer’s stream,
And the nightingale sings round it all the day long ;
In the time of my childhood ’twas like a sweet dream,
To sit in the roses and hear the bird’s song.
That bower and its music I never forget,
But oft when alone, in the bloom of the year,
I think—is the nightingale singing there yet ?
Are the roses still bright by the calm Bendemeer ?’

MOORE : *Lalla Rookh*.

THE way to the north leaves Shiraz through Tang-i-Allah Akbar,—‘The Pass of God-is-Great.’ To the traveller from Isfahan his first sight of the beautiful plain of Shiraz is framed by the great gateway which bars the mouth of this pass. So overwhelmed with joy and astonishment is the weary wayfarer supposed to be at so pleasant a sight that the exclamation ‘God is great !’ rises involuntarily to his lips, whence the name the place goes by.

It was a dull, misty day, hovering on the verge of rain, when I approached this gateway of Shiraz,—from the wrong direction, of course, to gain this supreme moment of joy. Over the hills there hung a white pall ; a colourless gloom beset everything ;—I could have wished that I had left the city of nightingales and roses in a happier mood.

My caravan, too, was in rather a sore temper. There had been some little difficulty about getting off.

We had arranged to start early (that is to say, about seven), in order to comfortably manage our march :— seven o'clock saw no mules there. At 7.30 I grew impatient, even though, by now, I was becoming somewhat Persianized. Going out, I found Saif in his little house, half dressed. I asked him, I fear in rather vigorous language, firstly why the mules had not come, and 'secondly, when they ought to have been there an hour ago, why he was not apparently worrying himself about the matter at all. His answer, divested of 'because's' and 'and so's,' was, 'I don't know.' My inquiries, however, roused his feelings, and when, shortly afterwards, I went back to make sure that all that could be done in the absence of the mules was completed, I saw him stride forth with a determined look which boded ill for the muleteer.

Just before breakfast, up trotted the mules unconcernedly. I had learned that for a foreigner to attempt to express his feelings in Persian on such an occasion was both futile and undignified, so I awaited Saif. He came up almost immediately, and this evidently was his first meeting to-day with the false muleteer, for, pushing past me as I ineffectually endeavoured to make a remark, he seized the scoundrel by the nape of the neck and commenced to shake him, cuff him, and address him in language which is best described as shrill and strong. I must confess that the little scene was not wholly without its satisfaction, and it was only about the fifth cuff that I mildly remonstrated, and shortly, to the muleteer's obvious relief, managed to abate my trusty interpreter's wrath. As, however, he was still in no condition to do anything but curse at the top of his voice, I left him doing so, and went in to breakfast, while the mules were dispatched on their journey so as to get a good start ; we ourselves intend-

ing to overtake them perhaps half-way through the march.

Here I feel I must pay a small tribute to Saif. What I should have done without him, I do not know; for not only did he assist me at the beginning in my conversations and negotiations with the Persians, but throughout my journey, until at Isfahan we parted, he looked after my affairs with a zeal and fidelity which was sometimes quite pathetic. I believe, however, that he always imagined, quite wrongly, that I undervalued his services, and this impression, coupled with the deep resentment he felt whenever I hurt his feelings, as I sometimes did by rebuking him when things went wrong, occasionally led to outbursts which were as unnecessary as they were vehement. The fact that this morning I had been annoyed with him for not rising sufficiently early touched his dignity very deeply. Perhaps I had, indeed, been a little hasty, and Saif, as my confidential guide, philosopher, and friend, certainly was in a position towards me very different to the rest of my retinue. Anyhow, the incident rankled, and very shortly came the crisis. It was just as I looked back through the Tang-i-Allah Akbar to get my last view of the city I was leaving. Turning to get a farewell view of Shiraz, my attention was riveted by something very different. There, serenely sauntering up behind us, were the mules. I had fondly imagined them four miles or so on the road, since they had been given at least an hour's start. 'Go back,' I said firmly to Saif, 'and ask them what this means.' With the aspect of a thunderstorm about to break, he silently pulled his pony round and clattered over the stones towards the rest of the caravan. Presently he returned, and said, 'They have been buying meat and bread.' I am afraid my comments

were more appropriate than polite ;—we were now scarcely likely to reach our night's halt before dark, and the events of the day had altogether been of such a nature as to by no means improve the temper. Saif's wrath, too, had been rising by slow degrees since day-break. The accusation of late rising, in particular, had aggravated affairs, and now came the explosion. First he was respectfully indignant : ' You say it is my fault.' (I had not.) ' Very well, sir, I wish you good day,' and he pretended to go away. I gently but firmly told him not to be foolish, and this incited him to at last break forth volubly at the top of his voice : ' I tell you, we blessed Mahometans '—tapping his chest—' get up for praying at the sun-up, I tell you, your exalted excellency, for praying. I have served you faithfully, I swore I would, and tell me, I will shed the last drip of my blood, I will die till I drop before you, only tell me. And these cursed dogs, I know a way I will manage, I will burn their fathers. Your excellency shall have no more trouble ; leave it to me, you need not trouble. And I say to you, we blessed Mahometans must rise for praying at sun-up, your noble excellency.' Eventually I pacified him, mainly, I believe, by venting my displeasure on a stray servant. But the storm did not at once subside, and he at intervals viciously whacked his poor little pony and any odd donkey he could reach.

My friend Stumps had by this time become the proud inhabitant of a basket, precariously poised on top of one of the loads, and in it he actually condescended to remain, except when he was thrown out by a specially violent lurch, or when I would go very close and he would wildly fall off and almost get trodden on in his efforts to reach me. However, he

stood his travelling nobly :—I believe he was the only one of the expedition with a temper just now.

Accompanied by all its appurtenances and a general gloom, the caravan plodded sullenly up through the raw morning to the summit of the pass ; thence we descended a precipitous path to the caravanserai of Bajgah, wound across the plain and in among the mountains beyond. The weather had slightly cleared, and the day was at least passable, when we sighted suddenly on the left the marvellously tinted slope of mountain, to which the chemicals in the soil had given a rainbow-like appearance ;—blue, yellow, red, and brown, all in fanciful stripes.

Away to the east there was a curiously fascinating picture. A high valley sloped up between two stately hills, whose summits were clad in a garb of mist stretching from one peak to the other in a sharp line of white, and mingling above in the grey monotony of the sky. Beneath, starting out in vivid contrast, was a patch of unclouded blue, which threw the sky-line of the valley into brilliant relief. In the surrounding world of drab colours, this little corner of colour and light was set like some picture of Nature. But the drab canvas and the glowing tints were real ;—it would have been possible to step into the picture, as the mind steps sometimes into a painter's work, and wanders there at will. That sloping valley looked as though it led to a brighter, lovelier land, and just over the line, drawn sharp beneath the blue, there surely should have lain some beauteous lowland basking in the sunlight. Ah ! those wondrous lands we have to leave unseen while we pass on our way,—the places we can never visit,—the deeds we can never do ! Perhaps, after all, they are better unseen, unvisited, undone, and perchance we should be thankful that

we can never look over the sky-line—of nature or of life.

Suddenly, round a corner, there opened out a valley to the north, and there, snug under a magnificent grey wall of sheer cliff, lay Zarghun ;—tier upon tier of little mud houses, for all the world like the auditorium of some immense amphitheatre. Here was our night's halting-place, and through the tiny bazaar we rode to the *chapar khaneh*. This little 'rest-house,' like most of its kind, had two stories. The *bala khaneh*, or upper chamber, was (and is generally in such places) made with a view to summer accommodation only. It consisted chiefly of windows and doors, and on a cold night, like that on which I found myself at Zarghun, seemed calculated to project a draught, or rather a gale, to any quarter of its interior. The whole effect was that of a rather windy stable. The chimney, too,—mud, like the rest of the hut—was also obviously a summer affair, and seemed capable of dealing with about a quarter of the smoke produced by the fire, the other three-quarters making its way, so it seemed to me, mainly into my eyes. It may be useful to the traveller to know that in such a case the difficulty can be partially overcome by pushing the fire a few feet up the chimney, which, although it sacrifices heat, is a gain in general comfort. The absence of a table sounds a trifle, but it is wonderful how disconcerting it is at first to have to eat food lying down, unless European prejudices concerning knives and forks are wholly thrown to the winds. Hunger, however, has a way of its own, and I remember that on this occasion there was not much except the bones and the fat left for little Stumps.

Next morning I awoke with a joyous feeling of

being friends with all the world. The tableland of Persia is about 5,000 feet above the sea, and this conduces to the most pleasant and exhilarating sensations. Like oxygen or like some sparkling wine, the air fills a human being with strange exuberant spirits. It is akin to the 'stimulation of the Alps,' which Stevenson describes with all his marvellous power. 'You wake every morning, see the gold upon the snow peaks, become filled with courage, and bless God for your prolonged existence. The valleys are but a stride to you; you cast your shoe over the hill-tops; your ears and your heart sing; in the words of an unverified quotation from the Scotch psalms, you feel yourself fit "on the wings of all the winds" to "come flying all abroad." Europe and your mind are too narrow for that flood of energy.'

I had never read that when I was in Persia, but I tried to describe it, and my words, though inadequate in their expression, are a curious verification of Stevenson's feelings.

'In these high places,' I find written in my diary, 'a strange ecstasy comes over a man,—the phantom of all the greatness on earth. He would be all things, the greatest in all things, for the glory of them is upon him. His soul cries out for all the mightinesses in the world;—nay, this world is too small. Beyond the universe he flies: he is with the gods.'

There is another feeling which comes upon the traveller, the feeling of 'home,' about which I have had a word before. Now, I was back on the old winding path with the old feeling of freedom,—that the world was at my service for my use and enjoyment; but at the end there was always home. It was sometimes an immeasurable distance off,—a goal, like death, that would come at the end of things, it did

not much matter when,—indeed, the mind hardly thought or could realize when. Yet it was there, something comfortable and restful and unworried about, drawing the feet quietly, resistlessly on. It seems strange to talk about a sentiment for ‘home’ in these days of flats and ‘the Continent’; but there, somewhere or other, in every well-constituted human heart, there lurks the old feeling. It may be enlarged to a land or contracted to an attic, home will always exist, and, alas! for the man who has no definite point to which to fasten down his longing affection. Yet it may be said, paradoxically enough, that there is no home unless you are away from it. It is only in the deserts and the jungles and the far-away mountains and valleys that there comes the true sensation of home. Then, indeed, it sometimes comes very keenly. It is aroused by a little thing; a shade of green, the trickling of water, the breath of the wind, a chance cry or a stray odour,—and the whole yearning desire for the old associations and the old places floods over the heart. ‘My thoughts to-day are all of home,’ I once wrote on my travels. ‘Sometimes an overpowering longing to be there comes over me, a great dragging at the heart that makes the thought of all the weary miles almost too much to bear. I fall into a day-dream on some monotonous march, and for a little there are about me friends and familiar things; then with a start I awake, and there, all around, is the white, lonely waste, bounded by the far snow-clad hills, and I, who was a moment ago thousands of miles away, am back again plodding my tiny inches forward on my little pony.’

So in all our journeyings there is always somewhere far away the magnet drawing us forward with varying force to the end,—be it home or death.

But now there was life and Persia, and I was friends with all the world. I lavished films on picturesque wells and dirty little boys. I would like to have given all my money to an old beggar woman—and compromised with twopence. The world was ideal, and even the mules were in time.

We were close to Bendemeer, the ‘calm Bendemeer’ of ‘Lalla Rookh.’ To a poet has always been accorded a certain licence of diction. His business is to obtain his effect, and if he does so—well, we must not inquire too narrowly into his methods. He can always say that he really sees more in the ordinary objects of this world than those who are not blessed with a poetic mind. In dealing with the past, moreover, he is on even surer ground. He has time in his favour. What is now may not have been so at the period of which he is singing. He can make verdant a desert, people desolate places with heroes and heroines and their Courts, nor needs a shred of present evidence to support what he has done. It is not,—but it might have been; time is his defence.

Few poets have more liberally availed themselves of their privileges in this respect than Moore, who, in addition to writing about the past, also took the precaution to write about a land that was far away and visited by few. Sometimes, indeed, he transgresses further than even his privileges will warrant. He defies natural laws which even a poet should obey. Men may alter, but Nature remains disobligingly the same. So, when the poet talks of ‘Kishma’s amber vines,’ referring to an island which is as desolate as the Sahara, and which by no conceivable process could ever be, or have been, transformed by man into anything else, there is nothing to be done except to

remark that there are lengths to which even a poetic licence will not stretch.

With regard to Bendemeer, Moore has a stronger case. There certainly is no 'bower of roses by Bendemeer's stream' to-day, and the nightingale would find it a sorry business to eke out a living in the barren desert which lies around; but then, here there is certainly 'a possibility that in ages past a different state of things existed. Time was when the great plain through which runs the River Bendemeer, and which stretches straight away to the pillars of Persepolis and the rock-tombs of Naksh-i-Rustam, was evidently a fertile and populous place. Persepolis was the capital of a great empire. It was the residence of Kings and their Courts, and all around it lay the homes and properties of thousands who dwelt in the great city or cultivated the surrounding fields. Even in Le Bruyn's days, a mere two hundred years ago, there were scattered about the plain over eight hundred villages;—to-day there are not more than a couple of score.

Nowhere does Persia more surely show the record of her fallen greatness than in this plain of Merv-Dasht. Those who would care to gain some idea of the magnificence of the place in the old days have only to turn to the delightful and essentially Oriental drama depicted in the Book of Esther. The scene is laid at Persepolis, 'in those days when the King Ahasuerus' (who was Xerxes) 'sat on the throne of his kingdom.' The drama opens with a description of a great feast in the palace of Shushan, which was Persepolis itself; a feast 'both unto great and small, seven days, in the court of the garden of the king's palace; where were white, green, and blue, hangings, fastened with cords of fine linen and purple to silver rings and pillars of

marble: the beds were of gold and silver, upon a pavement of red, and blue, and white, and black marble. And they gave them drink in vessels of gold (the vessels being diverse one from another), and royal wine in abundance, according to the state of the king.' It was in the palace that the King and Haman sat down to drink when they had ordered the destruction of the Jews, and in some little house under the high hills lived Mordecai and Esther, his adopted daughter, who secured their safety and the downfall of Haman himself. It was in the palace that the fateful banquet took place at which Esther accused Haman, and it was in the city just below that they hung Haman on the gallows he had prepared for Mordecai. So it is not hard to believe that long ago the great plain watered by the River Bendemeer presented a very different appearance from the present; that roses were to be seen and nightingales to be heard around its banks, and that here, at least, friend Time has an excuse for coming to the poet's assistance.

Certainly there is to-day no suggestion of the scene painted in 'Lalla Rookh.' Through a desert plain, barren alike of verdure and of population, varied here and there by some grey marsh, from which, at the approach of the traveller, rise countless thousand ducks with a great whirring of wings, to swish away overhead and circle ever lower again into settling-places in the soft sedgy recesses;—through such a land there winds a sluggish little river between ugly mud banks. That is my Bendemeer; a sad contrast to the picture drawn by the poet.

Crossing the river, I rode on across the plain until, away beneath the hills far ahead, I saw a dim, terrace-like shadow. Could that be Persepolis? The march was half accomplished, and I sat down to let my pony

feed and rest and to eat some dates. Suddenly I chanced to look over to the north-east ;—the changing light had thrown a shadow on the hills, and against it upon that dim terrace stood out delicate finger-like pillars—yes, it was the city of the great Kings. Just a few little thin threads of white under the barren hills looking over the deserted plain—that was all.

As I rode on, I pictured to myself what once upon a time would have met the eye of a traveller coming, as did I, from the south-west. I re clothed the plain in green, repeopled it with men and women, reconstructed the mighty city, rehabilitated in their glory the decaying halls of the ancient palace. Rich fields, well-built houses, the prospect afar of a thousand roofs, the motion and glitter of many men, the pomp of processions, and the myriad magnificences of a royal city—all this I might have ridden through in those old days ; and now—those few forlorn lines of white scarcely visible against the unchanging hills.

The road was devoured under my horse's feet, the pillars grew, took shape, sometimes vanishing in the alternations of light and shade, and then standing out with a cleaner vividness. Formless masses of black appeared to the south of the white columns—the palace of Darius ; dark blots sprang up on the hill-side—the tombs. Then, far away to the north, there became visible dim shadowy crosses recessed in the cliffs, each with a black dot in the centre—the sepulchres of the Achæmenian monarchs. Through plough and waste and river I pushed on straight for Persepolis itself, and at last the shadow of the great terrace walls lay across the path, and the hoofs of my pony clattered up the wide flights of steps and over the paved courts.

I was quite alone. My pony, glad to take its ease,

nibbled the scanty grass while I looked around. All about was the silent impressiveness of departed grandeur. There was a sense of awe at the careless, lavish tremendousness of the majestic ruins ; a feeling of pitiful reverence for the outraged glory left, unheeded, to decay.

Somehow there was a peculiar pathos about this place that I have never felt elsewhere ;—I think it is half what it is and half where it is that gives Persepolis its strange sadness. It is not only the thoughts of the grandeur that man has mutilated, of the great past that has fallen to such dire decay ; it is that it all stands so utterly solitary, so deserted. Bereft of all its surrounding life, abandoned as much by humanity and by Nature as by its glories, in its supreme desolation Persepolis forms, indeed, a fitting chord to close the dirge of the dead past. Apt reading in such a place would be Omar or Ecclesiastes,—the ‘vanity of vanities’ of the preacher would be re-echoed from every corner and court.

There is a something in the very old which thrills in an indefinable way ;—it takes a thousand years to make a college lawn ; it had taken two thousand to fashion what I was looking at. To such a work—a few hundred years, what do they mean ? Some of us men and women gone and others come ; a pillar more or less ; a little eaten by the wind and the rain from this massive gateway ; a word defaced ; a figure mutilated. Curious irony, is it not, that we poor humans that moralize and wonder about time and eternity and mortality are ourselves so much less permanent than our works ? Persepolis will still see many generations of travellers standing where I once stood, and gazing on its pillars and inscriptions, when my eyes are long ago closed for ever. . . .

There was only time for a brief wander through the fallen palaces before I had to make my way back under the hills to the little mud hut which was to be my home for the next few days. On my way I came across things I have not seen mentioned elsewhere. About half-way towards the *chapar khaneh* of Puzeh, for which I was bound, a long tongue of land runs up between the hills. In a bay on the north-east side of this, a short way up the rocks, I saw some square openings in the stone; one, under a projecting eave of rock, looking for all the world like the front of a little thatched cottage with an open door. I clambered up, and found that each opening gave access to a small chamber about 6 feet long by 3 feet high, into which it was just possible to creep. There were three complete chambers and two more unfinished ones. None had any inscription; only, in front of the largest and of the two unfinished ones, there was carved in the stone a trough, the largest being 6 feet by 2 and $1\frac{1}{2}$ feet deep. Inside the little huts was a small groove two feet long at an angle from the doorway, which I imagined to have been connected with the process of closing some door which used to exist. There were also recesses at the top of the doorway inside, presumably for a hinge of some sort. The unfinished huts had only the trough completed and a rough indication that more work was intended. In the rock above the largest hut there was cut a trough 6 feet by 2 and $1\frac{1}{2}$ feet deep, sloping slightly downwards. There was also a deeper trough in the rock a little lower towards the east. Two of the finished chambers were on the south side, one on the north.

Night was falling as I passed along the foot of the cliffs, and it was in the misty dusk that I arrived at my mud house. Coming from the grey ghosts without,

the flickering of the fire on the brown walls was very cheering, and my little room was quite home-like. In such matters the frame of mind makes a great difference, and, maybe, others less ready to be satisfied than I was at this moment would have taken exception to their abode. Saif, indeed, quite expected me to do so myself, and when I asked where my room was, he remarked with well-meaning and indignant irreverence: 'My God, where is it?' Certainly the accommodation was limited. There was no mat, no table, no chair, even the 'crazy hingeless door' of which Lord Curzon speaks had gone, and between the two gaping doorways there blew a shrill wind, to which a couple of round holes in the wall contributed their own individual little draughts. However, the two holes were stopped with haversacks, mackintosh sheets were hung over one doorway, which at all events stopped the wind blowing through the room, and my bed made a really excellent seat. A wooden box, used to contain kitchen utensils, was pressed into service as a table, and after a hearty meal I covered myself with my military great-coat as an extra compensation for the unobstructed doorway which was half-way down my bed, and thus laid myself to sleep, almost, perhaps, where long ago, and amid rather different surroundings, had slept Xerxes or Darius.

CHAPTER XIII

NAKSH-I-RUSTAM

‘Vanity of vanities, saith the Preacher ; vanity of vanities, all is vanity.

‘What profit hath a man of all his labour which he taketh under the sun ?

‘One generation passeth away, and another generation cometh : but the earth abideth for ever.’—*Ecclesiastes*.

I WAS now in the presence of some of the wonders of the earth, great memorials of an ancient civilization, works which had lasted through generation after generation, and seemed, like the earth itself, made to abide for ever.

Round about the plain wherein was set the little rest-house which formed my home there are scattered no less than three chief groups of ancient remains. First of all, there is the city of Persepolis itself, then the rock-tombs and sculptures at Naksh-i-Rustam, and, lastly, the scattered ruins of the old city of Istakhr.

To the traveller who comes from Shiraz, the *chapar khaneh* of Puzeh lies straight ahead in the middle of the valley through which runs the road to Isfahan. Standing at the *chapar khaneh* and looking up the valley towards Isfahan, Persepolis lies to his right a mile or so distant. To the left—that is, northwards—lie the tombs and tablets of Naksh-i-Rustam, not much further off, perhaps, than Persepolis itself, but more difficult of access by reason of the circuitous route by which they have to be approached. Immediately in

for, wherein are three panels of rock sculpture. This place is called Naksh-i-Rejeb, and beyond it, towards Persepolis, will be found the rock chambers which have been already described. Beyond this, again, there are the tracks of two old roads, which lead by a short cut over the mountains down behind Persepolis. Such is, roughly, the geography of the area within which relics of the past are to be found.

A word of history is also necessary. It is of first importance to remember that there are two entirely different periods to which the remains belong, and that some of them are probably separated by almost a thousand years in time.

The two periods which have left their mark on this part of Persia, and, indeed, on Persia as a whole, are, first, the Achæmenian, which extended from 558 B.C. to 331 B.C., and, second, the Sassanian, which lasted from A.D. 226 to A.D. 651. There are, of course, certain remains which probably date from even before Achæmenian times, and there are certainly some which are post-Sassanian ; but, generally speaking, the whole of those in the plains about Persepolis fall into the two periods named. Into these two periods they shall be briefly catalogued, and in so doing, I will also catalogue with them the other historic ruins by which my path lay on my journeyings.

First of all, then, in the dim past, probably before the great Kings of the Achæmenian dynasty had been born, there were made two fire-altars, a short way round the corner northwards from Naksh-i-Rejeb. They go back to legendary times, and of their history there is little that can be said. To some such period, too, there may belong the curious rock dwellings at Reneh, which I afterwards saw when passing through the Elburz Mountains.

Next we come to the Achæmenian period itself, and this may be divided into two portions. First, the time of Cyrus, during which was built Pasargadæ, which lies a little farther on the way to Isfahan than Persepolis, and which will shortly come to be described. There are Cyrus's tomb, the remains of his palace, and the celebrated monolith, famed for its figure of the King and the historic inscription once engraved thereon. The second portion of the Achæmenian period includes the reigns of all the later monarchs, Darius, Xerxes, and their successors. Persepolis was their city, and at Naksh-i-Rustam they built their tombs. To this period also may possibly belong some of the older remains at Shahpur, but, of course, it was long before Shahpur's day, and the city and rock tablets had no existence until hundreds of years afterwards. The stone tables and troughs, however, seem as though they were coeval with undoubtedly Achæmenian remains, and it seems most probable that centuries before Shahpur had built there, the site was occupied by another city. Istakhr is also of this period, and there are other scattered remains, such as Naksh-i-Rejeb, and probably the Takht-i-Taous, which are also Achæmenian. After 331 B.C. there comes a great gap of time, during which no substantial works were bequeathed to generations to come. Then, with the revival of the fortunes of Persia, under Ardeshir Babegan and Shahpur, and with the restoration of Zoroastrianism, came new artistic vigour.

Great deeds merited great memorials, and it is little to be wondered at that the Sassanian monarchs should have chosen as a place in which to record their deeds the site of the great relics, already monuments of antiquity, which were fashioned hundreds of years before by their mighty predecessors, the Achæmenian Kings.

So it came about that under the tombs of Xerxes and Darius and Artaxerxes, and all along the cliff to the west, Shahpur and the Kings who followed him cut their great rock pictures. Another Sassanian relic is the series of inscriptions in the cave of Hajiabad, not far from Naksh-i-Rustam. To the Sassanian period also, of course, belong the sculptures and ruins at Shahpur, which, in several cases, are almost identical with those at Naksh-i-Rustam, and also the statue which lies prone in the great cave.

After the end of the Sassanian period, there is practically nothing which has been left to attract the attention of later times. Recently some attempts have been made by later Kings to imitate the works of Shahpur and his successors, but the attempts are miserably inferior in execution and, it must be added, in subject.

From what has been written, it will be evident that I was now in the very centre of a storehouse of the past. My riches, indeed, embarrassed me, and I hardly knew which way to turn during the few days which I was able to spend here. The first morning dawned most disappointingly; driving misty rain beat across the plain and up the valley, but time would allow of no delay, and about nine o'clock Saif and I, escorted by a knowledgeable Persian, set off for Naksh-i-Rustam. The place is only to be approached by a considerable detour to the east or west, and we chose the latter way. Just westwards from the *chapar khaneh* the river is fordable, and, crossing here, we rode along, sliding and stumbling over slippery tracks, to a little village. There we turned sharp to the north, and after an uncomfortable ride through the wind and rain, we saw standing out on the rocks close ahead the tablet of Ormuzd and Ardeshir.

It will have been made clear that at Naksh-i-Rustam there are three complete sets of ancient works. First, the fire altars of hoary and legendary age, then the tombs of the Kings and a mysterious fire temple, to which I will refer later, and, last, the series of sculptured panels which celebrate the Sassanian monarchs and their works.

It is an impressive sight; above, cut sheer out of the rocks, stand the great cross-like tombs, carved and recessed, with, in the centre of each, the small black door which leads to the centre galleries and vaults. Below, scattered along the base of the cliff, are the panel pictures of the Sassanian Kings. Set in a small dip straight before the tombs squats a square, solid-looking, stone-built temple, while to the left, where the cliff grows lower, is a solitary pillar of stone, a little way behind which are the ancient fire altars.

There are four tombs and seven rock pictures. Both tombs and pictures have been described with such minuteness of detail and accuracy of description by Lord Curzon that it would be only possible for me to repeat again what he had already said were I to attempt anything more than a rough impression of the scene. I will, therefore, only give some such rough impression, together with any small details of individual interest in my explorations.

First, then, as to the rock pictures, and in describing both these and the tombs themselves, they shall be numbered from the right—that is, the east. We approached from the west, and rode straight up under the tombs to the far end, where the first tomb looks out at right angles to the rest. It is between the first and second tombs that there is carved the first rock panel. This is of especial interest, as it contains what is said to be the only figure of a woman which is to be

found in such carvings in Persia. The figure is that on the right, and from its large hips and feminine contour the matter of its sex is certainly placed beyond doubt. The whole tablet is generally taken to represent either Varahran II. or Varahran V. and his Queen. Some, indeed, assert it is in commemoration of the King's marriage. The Sassanian monarch himself, with his huge, busby-looking crown, holds solemnly the royal circlet, the other side of which is grasped by his lady. Behind stands a faithful retainer, and between the King and Queen is a tiny and much-mutilated figure, which may be presumed to be that of a child (which, by the way, rather militates against the idea that the whole picture represents the King's marriage). Personally, I like to think that here we have Varahran V.—Bahram Gur—‘Bahram of the wild ass’—and his Queen. He it is whom Omar has introduced into one of his most mournful images—

‘And Bahram, that great hunter, the wild ass
Stamps o’er his head, but cannot break his sleep.’

He was, indeed, killed out hunting over this very plain the *gur*, from which he took his name. If it is he, however, the Queen offers some little difficulty, for, alas! he was no true lover. It is fabled, indeed, that he had seven mistresses, each in her own castle, to each of whom he was faithful, presumably, in turn. However it be, it pleases me at least to think that in our picture we have the great hunter and the royal lover whose name we know in poetry, history, and romance.

Next come twin tablets, the second and third, one over the other. In these and in the fifth we see depicted the combat of horsemen with lances. Whether

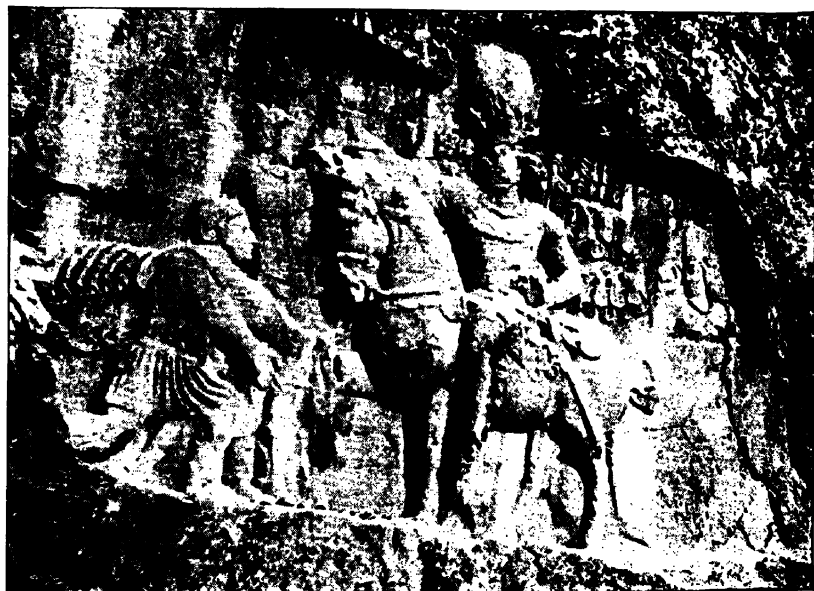
it be in battle or in the lists I know not ; but, lance in hand, the King meets his foe at close quarters. There is a vigour and sense of movement about these pictures which makes them live with a strange vividness after all these fifteen hundred years. The steeds are stretched at a gallop, to the left the King leans forward on his lance, over against him whirls up his adversary. That is the first picture of the three. Look above to the second panel ;—they have met. The King! the King! the victory is with the King! The foe reels ; his lance, quivering, recoils ; his horse, thrown on its haunches, staggers as the rider is forced from the saddle, and the King careers proudly on. Look again to the left, where the fifth tablet stands out. It is a little later in the tale of the King's triumph ; and now his enemy will ride no more, for see, his horse is overthrown, his lance, shattered, droops idly in his hand, while the King pierces his throat as he sinks inert from the saddle.

Such is the story of the three pictures. Their hero is said to be Varahran IV.

Now we must go back to the fourth, for to follow our story we have had to miss a tablet. The King receives homage ; Persia receives homage from Rome. Cæsar kneels before Shahpur, his great features wrought in strenuous supplication, the lips formed to pour forth a prayer. Up to him rides the King, his left hand on his sword, his right hand outstretched to grant in royal scorn to the lowly fugitive Cyriadis, who stands before him, that which he has denied the kneeling Emperor. It is almost a repetition of what appears on the cliff walls at Shahpur and at Darabjird. There is the same pathos in the suppliant Roman's attitude and features ; there is the same proud contempt in the carriage of the Persian King. A worthy record, this,



THE GOD AND THE KING NAKSH-I-RUSTAM.



ROME KNEELS TO PERSIA—NAKSH-I-RUSTAM.

of the Persian triumph. Maybe Shahpur brought Valerian captive in chains to Persia; maybe he stepped, as they say, on his bent back to mount his horse; maybe he bound the Emperor's body and dragged him before the Persian mob; maybe he hung his stuffed skin from a temple roof when death had freed his old body from torture;—maybe he did all these things. But Shahpur—the wise Shahpur,—did no work which more excellently commemorated his triumph than these stone pictures of the Roman's shame and humiliation, for they live for us to-day, and shall live for our children and for our children's children. Through all the centuries they say, and will say, 'Behold the power of Shahpur, behold the humbling of the pomp of Rome.'

The fifth tablet is the third of the equestrian series which has been described. The sixth is a peculiar one. It runs round a bend in the rock, and is a picture of Varahran II. and his courtiers,—unfinished, except for the King, who stands at full length. Lord Curzon suggests that the reason that only the heads and part of the shoulders of the courtiers are visible is that they are standing behind 'a species of barrier or pew'; but I certainly incline to the opinion (which Lord Curzon mentions in a footnote) that the picture is an unfinished one, and that it was originally intended to portray all the figures at full length. There are two facts which tend to disprove the 'pew or barrier' theory: first, the line beneath which the stone is unsculptured is an absolutely plain, square, and unornamented one, whereas had it represented the edge of a 'pew' it would have either been rounded, decorated, or bevelled: secondly, round the corner to the west it becomes irregular and uneven, finally wandering vaguely into the rock—more a suggestion

of an unfinished work than of the termination of a 'barrier or pew.' Beneath this picture is an oblong smooth space, destined, I should say, for an inscription, since the size of this empty tablet is so small that were another picture engraved it would have to be on an entirely different scale to anything we have yet seen. Just round the corner to the east, on part of the space smoothed for the main picture, but separate from it, is the figure described by Morier and Porter. It is a rude, ill-designed affair, apparently either of much later date, or merely a rough unfinished sketch, for the relief is very small, and it presents a peculiar flat appearance.

The seventh and last tablet is that of the god Ormuzd presenting the royal circlet to Ardeshir Babegan. The god—a majestic figure, with his clean-cut features and square beard—holds out the circlet with his right hand, while his left grasps the sceptre emblematic of divinity. The King approaches from opposite, and with outstretched arm grasps the other side of the circlet. Each is mounted, and the horse of each tramples a figure underfoot. That under the King's charger is said to be Artabanus; the other, beneath the hoofs of Ormuzd's horse, Ahriman, the spirit of evil. The figures are finely executed, but, alas! the horses detract from the effect. The typical processional horse of Sassanian sculpture is very different from those battle-steeds which we have seen in the pictures of mounted combat. There is no impression of life about the sturdy, compact, and usually proportionless animal which does duty on State occasions in rock sculpture. He, indeed, presents an appearance which, if not ridiculous, is certainly incongruous. On the chest of the god Ormuzd's chubby charger is engraved:

TOYTOIΠOCΩΠONΔIOCΘEOY

‘This is the image of the God Zeus.’

(Ormuzd being, of course, translated to Zeus in the Greek.)

The inscription on the King's horse is more illegible. I deciphered it, to the best of my ability, as follows :

TOYTOIΠOCΩΠON(MACΔACNOY)
ΘEOYAPTA[KAPCY-BACIA]EΩC[BA]CIAEΩN
APIANON[EKT]E[NOY]CΘEΩN(EKTONOY)
ΘEOYIIAIIA[KOYB]A[CIA]EΩ[Σ].

With the missing letters (in brackets) supplied from those clearly visible on the third tablet at Naksh-i-Rejeb it would read thus :

‘This is the image of the Ormuzd-worshipping God Artakarsur (Ardeshir), King of Kings Arian of the race of the Gods, son of the God Papak the King.’

The cliff of Husein Kuh, the hill in the face of which are cut the tombs and sculptures, runs down from 800 feet and more at the north-eastern extremity till it peters out into the plain of Merv-Dasht to the west. The end of the hill comes soon after the last rock picture, and round the corner, where the ground slopes gradually into the plain, are set the two fire altars which are taken to be among the oldest relics in Persia. The worship of fire has had a chequered and curious history in this land. Its origin is lost in the lists of legendary antiquity. For long it was the supreme religion of a mighty empire ; then, in 331 B.C., came the conquest of Alexander, the sacking of Persepolis, the crushing of the national religion, and the destruction of its documents and books. Next followed a long period of subjugation and of foreign creeds, but with the revival of Persia's fortunes under Ardeshir

in A.D. 226, fire-worship found a new life, and its books were, in some form, again published. Through the long period of Sassanian Kings it maintained its power, and it was not until the Arab invasion of A.D. 650, and the sweeping victories of Islam, that at last the historic religion of Persia fell for ever beneath another faith. Mahometanism, with its brute strength and young vitality, effectually subdued the flame that was once so bright and so ardent. Even to-day, however, a few embers of the old creed yet survive the quenching, and there are still about eleven thousand Zoroastrians in Persia, besides those who, scattered over the world, still maintain the traditions of their ancestors. They have had, naturally, to cling to their faith through many trials and persecutions, and, until very recently, the disobligations and the actual sufferings inflicted upon them sound almost incredible to those among whom religious toleration, even if it is not always observed in the spirit, is at all events acknowledged in the letter. In Yezd, the centre of the Zoroastrian community, up to 1885 no Parsee was allowed to carry an umbrella. Up to 1895 they had to wear a torn cap. Up to 1891 they had to walk in town, and even in the desert they had to dismount if they met a Mahometan. Up to 1895 they were not allowed to wear eyeglasses or spectacles, and up to 1898 there was a prohibition against white stockings. I quote the following from Mr. Napier Malcolm's 'Five Years in a Persian Town,'* to which I am also indebted for the preceding facts.

'About 1891 a *mujtahid* caught a Zoroastrian merchant wearing white stockings in one of the public squares of the town. He ordered the man to be beaten and the stockings taken off. About 1860 a

* 'Five Years in a Persian Town': J. Murray, 1905.

man of seventy went to the bazaars in white trousers of rough canvas. They hit him about a good deal, took off his trousers, and sent him home with them under his arm.'

Besides legalized annoyances, there were also illegal persecutions, which often did not stop short at murder.

Such is a short sketch of the religion for the ancient rites of which were built the two fire altars just round the western corner of the Husein Kuh at Naksh-i-Rustam. The altars are queer-looking little things about 5 feet high, set close to one another. They are carved from the solid rock, and taper slightly from their base to form a crown a little over $3\frac{1}{2}$ feet square. This is hollowed out into a kind of basin, presumably for holding the materials to be burnt. To the question as to what the rites were, or on what occasions they were performed, even conjecture cannot frame an answer. All that we can be certain of is that they are fire altars, and that they were probably closely related to those which we see depicted upon the sculptures of the great tombs themselves.

Up the rocks here there are several sights to see. First, a lonely pillar, nearly 6 feet high, standing on a bluff, without base, without capital, without carving of any kind,—just a solitary stone post. A little farther up, among various evidences of man's work, are flat tables, or *dakhmas*, similar to those at Shahpur. Here also are many of those curious troughs which are also to be seen at the Sassanian city, and several odd little basins cut here and there in the stone. From the analogy of the basin-like tops of the fire altars, these may possibly have been used for Zoroastrian rites in fire-worshipping days. Further on are the 'little holes or windows' that Morier speaks of,

but Ker Porter was right in saying that there are no traces of inscriptions.

Descending the hill which we had partially climbed, and coming back beneath the tombs and the pictures, there stood before us the mysterious square stone building which has been the occasion of so much controversy. No one has been able, apparently, to fathom its meaning,—at least, whenever anyone has professed to do so, there has always been somebody to contradict him, and it still remains a matter upon which everybody is entitled to his own opinion. The edifice, which a young Persian we met here called 'Nakkara Khaneh,' or 'The Drumhouse,' is nearly at the base of a little hillock facing the tombs (and not at its summit, as Lord Curzon says), and is a square tower built of blocks of white limestone. Hideously ugly, it rears aloft a grim square form, pitted with little recesses and small windows, mere panels in the stone wall. On the side facing the cliff is the doorway, which is about a dozen feet above the ground, and which can be easily entered after a scramble. Inside is a little room floored with blocks of stone and roofed by two huge slabs. It is a dripping, dirty little place; the flagged floor is partly uprooted, and the roof is blackened. The walls are at least 6 feet thick.

I made some detailed notes as to the various problems presented by this curious building, but they deal mainly with archæological technicalities. One theory, however, which I arrived at by a comparison of this structure with an evidently similar one at Pasargadæ, was that a considerable portion of this Naksh-i-Rustam temple has been earthed up in the course of ages, and that excavation might disclose that underneath the little room I have just described there is another chamber,—possibly a tomb.

We have now passed from the Sassanian pictures to the prehistoric fire altars and back to the relics of the Achæmenian age, and there only remains to be described the tombs of the Achæmenian monarchs themselves. Surely, I thought, as I stood beneath them and gazed at these marvellous works, no more impressive means could have been devised by man for perpetuating his fame and memory, and no more magnificent resting-place found for his dust. Three of the tombs stare out across the plain towards Persepolis. The fourth stands at right angles to the others, where the cliff turns sharply out to the south. All the sepulchres are very similar, the isolated easternmost one being, perhaps, the best preserved by reason of its position. Three of them have never been identified, but the second from the east we know now, from the cuneiform inscriptions thereon, to be the resting-place of Darius.

Each is a stupendous work of art. A gigantic cross has been recessed in the rock, the base some 30 feet up the cliff, the cross itself rising to 100 feet from the ground. The limbs are about 35 feet in breadth, and along the ledge which runs across the centre at the bottom of the transverse limbs there rises a row of four semi-detached pillars, supporting on their bull-headed capitals a mighty moulding. Above this portico comes the top limb of the cross, and this is filled with sculptured figures. Fourteen little images bear on their upraised arms a huge platform. On this stand, again, fourteen more, upholding yet another platform, upon which stands the King himself in his royal vestures. His hand is held aloft in invocation to the god Ormuzd, who, represented by a curious image of a head and shoulders rising from a scroll of wings, floats above his head, holding out in his hands

the royal circlet. Beneath the god and in front of the King flames a fire altar, while in the far background hangs the disc of the sun.

Between the centre pillars of the portico gapes the black void of a door, once closed with a great stone, now for ever open, and disclosing within, faintly seen through the obscurity, a prospect of stonework. The upper compartment of the doorway is solid stone, the lower portion only being pierced to give access to the tombs.

Such is the impression of any one of the four sepulchres.

There is little to differentiate them, except the inscription upon that of Darius. Within, as we shall see, no vestige remains of all the regal appointments of the dead; there are only the bare stone vaults and empty coffins. Still, though the dust and ashes have gone, and all the proud trappings of the kingly corpses, the tombs remain a splendid monument, and shall tell for countless years of those in whose honour they were fashioned. They have looked out on many races of men and heard many strange tongues;—they will look out on many a race and speech to come. Perhaps they may again see the vale of the Polvar smile into greenness and prosperity. Again,—who knows?—they may watch the greenness fade and the prosperity wane. There they will stay on while men come and vanish, until the earth grows cold and lifeless, until, maybe, a waterless void of air, it shall be whirled round the sun, another dead moon. ‘One generation passeth away and another generation cometh, but the earth abideth for ever.’

Truly, if to have his name remembered profiteth a man anything, these old Kings were wise in their generation.

I was possessed with a desire to climb the cliff and enter the actual sepulchre of an Achæmenian monarch, so I called to Nasr-ulla-Khan, my aforesaid Persian friend. 'Can we climb up into the tomb?' we asked. He replied yes,—all had been climbed into except the first, or easternmost, and even into this, so it is said, a *Feringhi* once managed to get up by a scaffolding. To testify to the accuracy of this statement, one of my Persian friend's suite at once swarmed up arduously into Darius's tomb, first removing his boots and superfluous clothing. I followed as far as the base of the cross, but they would not let me ascend the next piece, even if I would (they were loth enough to let me do what I did), as they said they would be held responsible for my decease if I happened to slip. I extracted a promise that they would come back—'Insh'allah,' of course,—the next day and haul me up, and then, in company with Nasr-ulla-Khan, we all set forth in the drizzle along the base of the cliffs towards the east, bound for the cave of Hajiabad. After a dreary two miles' ride, we arrived at the mouth of a fine gorge, running north-west, at the entrance to which, on the right, is the cave, a lofty recess in the limestone, now used by shepherds as a shelter. On entering, there are cut upon the right-hand wall an irregular, smoothed patch and six tablets, four, equally large, in a row some 6 feet from the ground, with, above, two larger ones, and, to the left, the irregular patch. Two tablets are engraved, and contain, according to Mr. Thomas, evidence in Pehlevi of Shahpur I.'s conversion to Christianity.

This cave is called Tang-i-Shah Sarvan, so my friend told me, and he conducted me up the gorge to another and smaller cave, where is the grave of one Sheikh Ali, a holy man. It is a broken Mahometan

tomb with a Persian inscription, and is remarkable chiefly for its picturesque position and the difficulty of getting there. I wished to examine a row of what appeared to be little 'votive' holes in the cliff to the north-east, but my friend was anxious to get back, and it was raining hard, so we made our way down to the village of Hajiabad, where Nasr-ulla-Khan, our friend, its owner, asked us to tea. After deliberation, I accepted, and very grateful the warmth was. Mr. Nasr-ulla-Khan patronized more largely than the teapot a glass bottle filled with a white liquid, pronounced to be *arrack*, which he first offered me, and then applied to his mouth and 'pulled' till the old man who had given it him remonstrated. He was, however, mutely waved aside, the process of drinking continuing meanwhile uninterruptedly.

After a smoke, I took leave, and arriving at Puzeh *chapar khaneh* about four, I started off at once with my gun to look for something for to-morrow night's dinner. I will quote the account of my little walk as I set it down in my diary: 'First I take a peep at Naksh-i-Rejeb, close by the *chapar khaneh*, and then climb the rocks a short distance and make my way along through the rain. The crest of the hill is clad in mist; the rain falls steadily and noiselessly; there is a hushed dampness over all. As I move quietly along I might be a hundred miles from a human being—it is eerie, this soundlessness. Can there be ghosts about—the spirits of those old people who once lived and moved with Darius and Xerxes? I stand and listen. . . . A little bird gives a sudden chirrup, then all is silence and mist. . . . Suddenly from in front, faintly but unmistakably, comes the *woof* of a panther . . . then, again, utter silence. I think of my recent episode with the wild-boar, look at my number "seven's," and make a

slight detour when I move on. Meanwhile, I am treated to quite a little concert of hill melody. Far overhead the crows float lazily through the mist, with hoarse, sharp croaks, to settle on the rocks above, long silhouetted lines of black blots against the white mist. From up the cliffs comes a soft *hoo-hoo*, the fifth, then the keynote above, scarcely breaking the silence, rather melting into it. It is some beast or bird, I know not which, mellow-voiced as a dove, yet not a dove, for there from away to the right comes the *coo-coo-coo*, and again *coo-coo*, that Pehlevi *where? where?* which the doves gently croon (and who can answer their question?). Then back comes silence, till out of the distance there rises a faint whirring note, rising, rising, ever rising, till at the climax of the scale there swoops overhead a wide phalanx of geese, and the note falls and falls till it sinks away into the silence and they into the gloom.

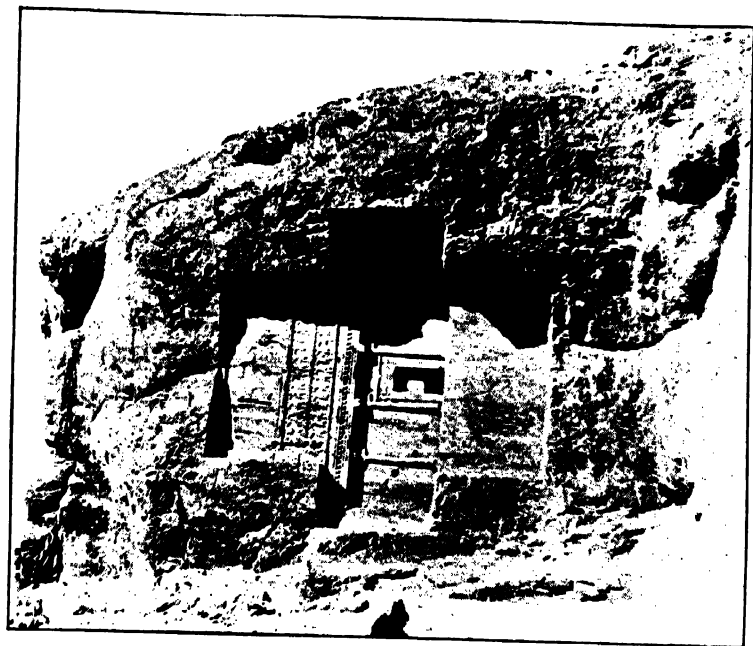
‘The dark is drawing nigh; a far jackal rudely breaks the harmony with his weird, inhuman howl—*ha-ha, ha-aa, ha-ha-ha-a-a, h-a-a-a-a, ha-eee*—and I must leave my symphony to the night. So I pass on down to the great inlet of land I have mentioned as running up into the hills half-way to Persepolis. Here I come across the work of man: a great causeway, just visible, following the line of the little valley; mighty blocks of stone placed to enclose a scarce visible path. I trace this upward;—all around are giant, uncouth rocks, huge shapes stare down at me from the mist above like stage faces in a pantomime; I am beset by horrid things ogling through the chill dimness. On I walk through this eerie land towards a strange calf-headed giant, who looks to heaven from the summit of the pass, and changes to a mere mass of stone as I come up to find my road stretching away

before me down a dip and up on to a moor beyond. There I lose it, and, crossing to the west, look round, to find it just behind me. It has crossed, too, beneath the ground, and, joining another from the westward, leads over the hill, while I follow till, of a sudden, over a bluff, I see what brings me to a halt. There below, in the half-light, lie the stupendous ruins of Persepolis. My road has led me, all unconscious, to this;—truly a well-planned road. I stand looking down, drinking in the magnificent sight.

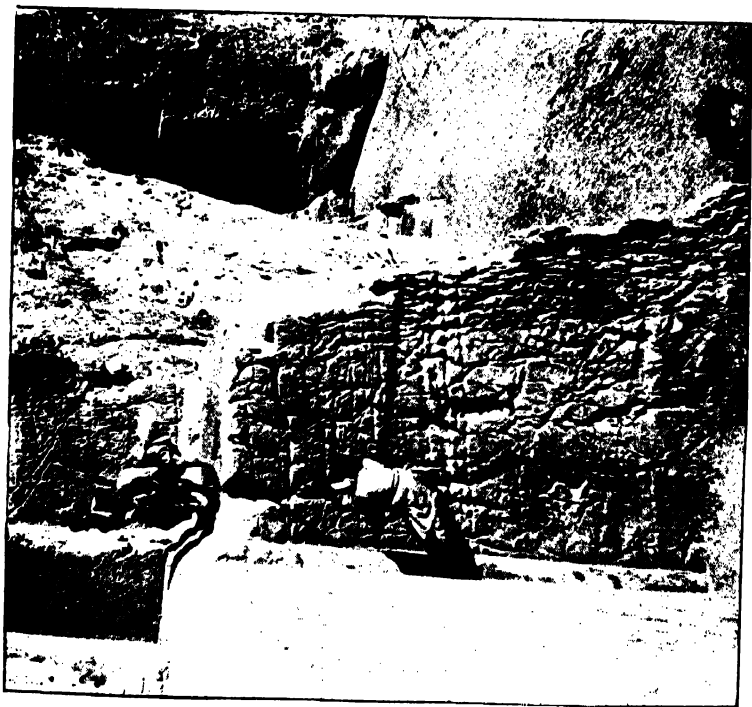
‘In a moment there is a quick scutter, a glimpse of two frightened little eyes, and a hare leaps up with a sudden realization of my presence, dodges, and makes off. The first barrel misses, but the second lays him kicking on his back—poor little beast!—truly an ill-planned road for you. But to-morrow’s dinner is provided for.

‘How curiously quick-varying are moods of thought! The world is changed in a trice, and it is some time before, walking back through the fast-falling night, the old eerie feeling resumes its sway, to be dispelled again by the shouts of Saif as I near home,—he has come out in fear lest I lose my way in the night. And surely, it is likely enough,—I had some thoughts of it myself; that half-fear of a strange darkness had already quickened my steps, and the fire in the little mud hut is gratefully cheery. Outside, the misty companions of my lonely walk may seek their night haunts in the darkness,—I am at home.’

I leaped out of bed next morning to find the sun shining over a crisp, sparkling world. Before long, we were off, by a shorter route this time, to Naksh-i-Rustam, where soon arrived Nasr-ulla-Khan and his crew. Then began the business of hauling us up to the tomb of the Achæmenian King. First an active



A TOMB OF THE KINGS—NAKSH-I-RUSTAM.



THE WAY UP TO XERXES' TOMB.

Persian climbed the cliff-face, then another, with ropes, and next my friend Nasr-ulla-Khan himself was dragged up. Now it was my turn. It looked very uncomfortable, and if—— But I tightened the rope round my chest, knotted it to another, and gave the signal. Kicking with my legs against the wall to avoid being grazed, I rose quickly through the air; the ground seemed to fall away beneath me, and I was soon hanging half-way between Xerxes' tomb and solid earth;—Xerxes' tomb, for he it was whose body most probably once lay in the place to which I was ascending. As has been said, the only sepulchre of which we have certain knowledge is that of Darius, the second from the east. But it seems probable that the next constructed was the third from the east, the one from which I hung. After this the fourth from the east was constructed, and then, there being no more room to the west, they added the lonely tomb in the easternmost angle of the rock. In that case, after Darius's, which is certainly the oldest tomb, would come Xerxes'; then Artaxerxes, who would have been buried in the westernmost sepulchre; and, lastly, Darius II., whose tomb would have been the easternmost.

So we will presume that it was beneath the burial-place of Xerxes that I hung suspended. As I gradually came nearer and nearer the centre ledge and the prospect of the plain grew more distant and more extensive, I had time to reflect with peculiar vividness on a little story concerning Darius's father and mother. They had expressed a wish to visit the great tomb which their son had prepared for himself, and, accordingly, forty priests had been told off to haul them up, exactly as I was being hauled up, in order that they might see the work. Just as they were reaching the

top, for some reason or another (I believe tradition says a snake ran out from some corner) the priests unfortunately let go their hold on the rope, and Darius's ill-fated parents were dashed to the ground and killed,—while, so goes the story, afterwards the forty priests were forced to follow them in their fatal descent. A better fate attended me, and very soon the jamming of my fingers between the rope and the rock announced that I was at the top. With various abrasions of my hands (which were, I remember, painfully evident as I wrote the account from which this is taken), I scrambled over the edge, and stood at last on the ledge of the transverse portion of the cross. Along past the pillars I edged, and, passing through the low doorway, I was in the Tomb of the Great King. At first there was only a stifling smell of bats and birds, a blinding darkness, and a dim vision of a stone vault. Then, as my sight adjusted itself, I saw before me, under a vaulted roof, three deep sepulchres cut from the living rock. Everything, indeed, was cut from the living rock. The gallery in which I was standing, the pillars outside, the cross itself, all were painfully and minutely carved out of the cliff face. The gallery was 22 yards from end to end and over 6 feet in breadth; and from it branched off three vaults, each containing three tank-like sepulchres. These were about 4 feet high, and once had huge stone lids rising to an apex, of which lids the remains can even now be seen. The roof of the gallery was flat, save at the far end, where it was vaulted. Although the stone lids remain, the tank-like sepulchres have been broken into, and inside, when I climbed there with a candle, there was nothing to be seen but an accumulation of filth, a dead pigeon, and the bones of sundry birds;—a noisome, suffocating

place it was now, this burial-place of Kings. I scrambled out of the sepulchre and returned to the entrance. This was about a third of the total distance from the right end of the gallery, looking in, and it showed signs of having once been closed by a huge stone, since there were grooves in the floor by the doorway. To the right I was confronted at the back of the gallery by a blank wall, unrelieved save where, high up, a recessed panel showed that possibly an inscription was once intended. At this end there was a curious little hole in the floor, presumably for drainage, of which I could not see the bottom. The whole place was stuffy, filthy, and begrimed. It was in the sepulchre next to this that Darius's devoted slave lived for seven years after his master's death. Maybe that then a tomb was a pleasanter dwelling. But now—ugh!—a gloomy, foul place, fit lodging for ghouls and bats, which sent a shudder down the back and made death seem a dank and horrid thing. It was good to be out in the sunlight again and swinging down to the earth.

CHAPTER XIV

'THE COURTS WHERE JAMSHYD GLORIED AND DRANK DEEP'

'The Palace that to Heav'n his pillars threw,
And Kings the forehead on his threshold drew—
I saw the solitary Ringdove there,
And "Coo, coo, coo," she cried; and "Coo, coo, coo."'

[This quatrain Mr. Binning found, among several of Hafiz and others, inscribed by some stray hand among the ruins of Persepolis. The ringdove's ancient *Pehlevi* 'Coo—coo—coo' signifies also in Persian 'Where—where—where?']

FITZGERALD.

OF course it was not really Jamshyd that 'gloried and drank deep' in the palaces of Persepolis. That is only the Persian account of affairs, and the Persian always prefers poetry to precision. Of history he has the most elementary conception; a thing is generally either 'old' or 'new.' It is true he has two divisions, into which he separates old things—the old and the very old. And he classes them generally by assigning them to the period of two of the most famous Persian monarchs, who happily reigned at convenient dates for the purpose. Anything that is old (*kadim*) is *vakhti-Shah-Abbas* (time of Shah Abbas). Anything that is very old (*kheili kadim*) is *vakht-i-Jamshyd* (time of Jamshyd). Shah Abbas reigned at the end of the sixteenth century A.D., and Jamshyd in a legendary period long before 600 B.C., so the division is sufficiently marked.

Persepolis is *kheili kadim*, and therefore classed in the Jamshyd period. Indeed, its Persian name is Takht-i-Jamshyd—that is to say, ‘the throne of Jamshyd.’ This simple, if rather inaccurate, historical method has its advantages from the point of view of a poet or a child, and as the Persian often somewhat resembles a combination of the two, it seems admirably adapted to the national use. Not that, indeed, the West has any great excuse, even here, for throwing stones at the East. Until quite recently the history and origin of Persepolis were the subject of the wildest conjecture to the whole world. Indeed, as Lord Curzon remarks, during the last two centuries only the ruins of Persepolis have been ‘variously interpreted as the work of Lamech and the tomb of Noah, as due to volcanic eruption and the worship of idols,’ and their date has been ‘promiscuously bandied about over a space of three thousand years.’ But the difference between East and West was that East did not know and did not care what Persepolis meant, and West certainly did not know, but was anxious to find out. Archæologist after archæologist, at varying intervals, visited the place, and gradually the information with regard to its details became more and more perfect. Then, suddenly, after centuries of patient work, there came the sudden solution of all doubts and difficulties. The secret of the cuneiform alphabet was discovered, and then there was no doubt left as to the origin and meaning, not only of Persepolis, but of all the other great works of old, whose founders had engraven their names and deeds thereon. There, from Persepolis, there had stared forth through all the years its story, waiting only for the man who could read it. He had come at last, and the message was revealed. With one swift stroke Noah and Lamech and volcanoes were

all for ever banished from the stage, and Darius was left the undisputed founder of Persepolis, as was Cyrus of Pasargadæ. Since then, by the inscriptions on doorways and pillars, man has been able to give names to almost every portion of the great collection of palaces on the platform at the base of the hills. From mystery, Persepolis has turned to history, and if it is no less a wonder to-day than it was a little over half a century ago, it is a wonder of a different kind.

Nowadays the way to Persepolis lies along the base of the hills to the south of the *chapar khaneh* of Puzeh. In old times, as I discovered on my solitary afternoon's walk, there were roads which led over the hills down behind the great platform. The ways I followed on that walk undoubtedly were the works of the people of old. They led by a short route to the hill north of Persepolis, and although to-day they end at the summit of the hill on the verge of an almost precipitous descent, and seem as though they could only be meant to conduct men to that hill alone, centuries ago there may have been works which have now perished, but which then continued them down to the plain itself.

The whole hill-side round about Persepolis is covered with evidences of quarrying, and some half-squared blocks betray the method of the mason's work. This was apparently to cut a chain of small square holes in the stone, which, weakened by this process, was then easily broken off. Past these hills we rode to Persepolis on the afternoon of my ascent to Xerxes' tomb. The day had cleared into a glorious sunlit afternoon, and after the rain the far-off pillars stood out clean and clear.

From the plain beneath, the platform of Persepolis

is gained by a magnificent double flight of steps. These steps are generously shallow and broad, and although they are falling into decay after their centuries of disuse and disrepair, it is still possible to ride up them without dismounting. The platform itself is a huge parallelogram, over a quarter of a mile long and nearly a quarter of a mile broad, built out from the base of the mountain. From the front it presents the appearance of a solidly built wall, sometimes fifty feet in height, composed of gigantic blocks of stone. On the comparatively flat surface afforded by this platform, there stands the great collection of palaces, which, built by successive Kings, went to form the completed marvel of Persepolis. Constructed of a limestone of such peculiar beauty that it has been mistaken for marble or porphyry, these palaces are set on the platform at different levels, and are in various stages of decay. The great staircase up which we ride is near the north-west angle of the platform. There are two flights diverging from the bottom and meeting again at the top to form a diamond-shaped figure, and the stairs are not single slabs, but sometimes as many as sixteen or seventeen are cut from one block of stone. At the top we are confronted by an imposing spectacle. Facing us is the porch of Xerxes, a huge structure consisting of two mighty gateways with, between, a pair of lofty pillars crowned by magnificent carved capitals. One gateway stands immediately fronting the staircase, flanked with two bull-headed monsters, who used to stare out across the plain before Time robbed them of their heads (and much of their bodies too). Straight behind are the two pillars,—once there were four,—and then comes the other gateway facing the mountain, and also tremendous with a pair of monsters, this time

winged. Such was the fitting approach to this place of palaces.

The worthy Fryer describes his impressions on his first visit to Persepolis in language which calls to be reproduced here.

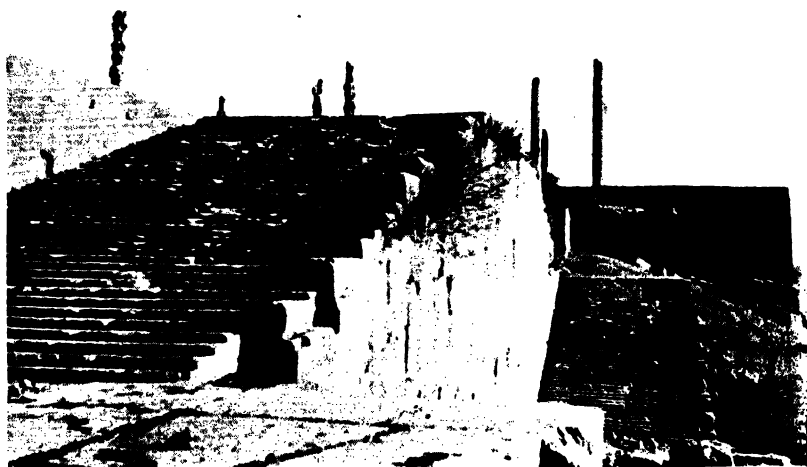
‘We clambred a spacious Staircase united some part of the Way up, when on each hand it led to the several Apartments two different Ways; at top were the Portals, and the Heads of the Columns worn with Age (*damnosa enim quid non imminuit dies*) which consumes everything; whose Bodies were Corinthian, but the Pedestals and Capitals of *Dorick* Order, as might be gained from what had resisted the corroding Jaws of Time, hardly lifting up their Reverend Crowns, though of most durable Stone.

‘Being entred the *Pomærium* of *Cambyfes* Hall (if Faith be to be given to the most learned of these Relators), at the Hall Gates we encountered two horrid Shapes both for Grandeur and Unwontedness, being all in Armour, or Coat of Mail, striking a Terror on those about to intrude; their Countenances were of the fiercest Lions, and might pass for such, had not huge wings made them flying Gryffons, and their Bulk and Hinder-Parts exceeded the largest Elephants.

‘In this August Place only Eighteen Pillars of Forty remain, about Fifty Foot high, and half an Ell Diameter, of the distance of eight Paces one from another, though we could count the Twenty two Bases; which agree with the Persian Memoirs, who therefore still call it *Chulminor*, the *Palace of Forty Pillars*: These may be seen on the Plain a great way, and at present are the Residences only of the Tyrants of the Lakes and Fens, Storks only keeping their Court here, every Pillar having a Nest of them.’



AN ANCIENT ROCK-CHAMBER NEAR PERSEPOLIS (AND SAIFULLASHAIL.)



THE GREAT STAIRWAY AT PERSEPOLIS.

That was over two centuries ago. To-day there are only thirteen pillars of the Hall of Xerxes left standing;—the last two hundred years have dragged down five. This hall, the greatest and most noble of those on the platform, and that which has left us the most striking relics of its former beauty, is approached from the porch through which we passed by a stairway at right angles thereto. Being on a higher level than the porch itself, the smaller platform on which it stands has a sunk-walled front, covered, as are the stairways themselves, with the finest sculptures. Processions of warriors, of men carrying offerings, of courtiers, march all along this wall, which raise the palace of Xerxes above the rest of the platform. Wherever a staircase occurs, in the triangular panel it forms with the ground there is to be seen a lion attacking a bull, and all are sculptured in high relief. Cuneiform inscriptions dedicate the palace to Ormuzd himself in the name of 'Xerxes the great King, the King of Kings, the son of Darius, King of the Achæmenians.' The whole of the sculptured processions are evidently intended to represent the ceremonies which took place in the city of Persepolis before the Achæmenian monarchs themselves, when tribute was brought by conquered peoples, homage was paid by loyal subjects, and all the pomp and power of a great empire was collected and manifested. Now all that is left is these thirteen pillars desolately standing above dilapidated ruins. Once, so says Lord Curzon, there must have been seventy-two of these magnificent columns;—even the scattered few that remain are sufficient to excite a sense of amazed admiration at their great conception. Rearing their great bull-headed capitals nearly seventy feet into the air, sixteen feet in circumference at their base, and composed of huge drums of solid

stone, they are, indeed, worthy relics of Persia's past. Now the only occupants of these great halls are the pigeons whom Binning's old traveller heard, and inscribed his little verse on some chance stone. Once, when I was wandering through the deserted courts, one of the little blue birds swayed from off the capital of a great pillar. My gun sprang to my shoulder, and then came into my mind the scribbled quatrain. Even thoughts of dinner succumbed to it, and I watched the bird wing its way up the great hills unharmed. Indeed, it were sacrilege to kill the priestess of such mystery and pathos on her very altar.

Beyond the hall of Xerxes to the southwards is the palace of Darius himself, a solid little collection of doorways and walls placed high up on the centre of the platform, and not nearly so impressive or lordly as the hall of the later King. Beyond this, again, still further to the south, is the palace of Artaxerxes III., rising sheer above the south-west corner of the parallelogram of palaces. The names of all these have been, of course, ascertained from the cuneiform inscriptions found on the walls of each. Behind the palace of Artaxerxes III. is the palace of Xerxes himself, and a little to the north-east of this is a lonely unnamed portico. Xerxes' palace is in a sad state of decay; only a few solitary doors and pillars remain to tell of its departed grandeur, and yet this must have been one of the largest of the buildings upon the platform. Straight behind this palace to the east are the half-buried remains of another edifice, some unidentified royal palace or hall.

Throughout all these buildings the carvings are frequent and impressive. Doorways are always sculptured with some typical scene: a King killing a

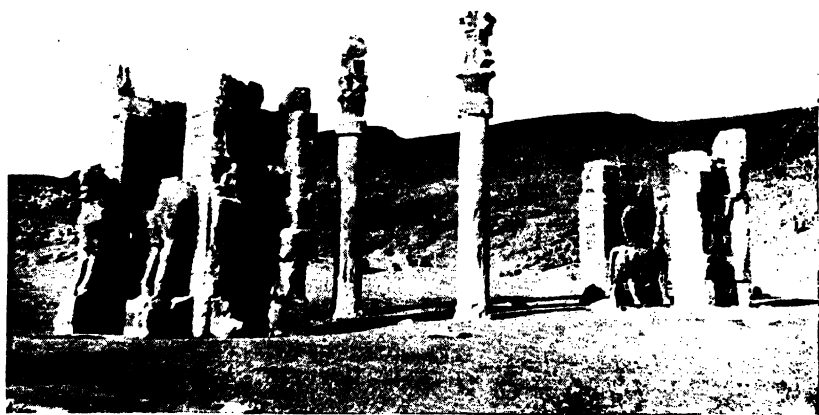
gryphon, a couple of lance-bearers, or a monarch proceeding in state, attended by a follower, who holds over his head a peculiar Japanesey-looking umbrella. Concerning the origin of this last, Le Bruyn remarks : ‘The parasol was antiently in use among the Persians, and Xenophon seems to fix the invention of it to the time of Artaxerxes, the brother of Cyrus the Younger, and not to that of Cyrus the Great, in whose reign the Persians imitated the habits, ornaments, and manners of the *Medes*, without having recourse to any precautions against the heat of the sun, or the violence of winds and seasons. But this was changed in the reign of Artaxerxes, who addicted himself to wine and debaucheries, with his whole court, and sunk into such an effeminate softness, that the shade of trees, and refreshing coolness of caverns and grotts, were no longer thought a sufficient shelter from the heat of the sun, parasols therefore became necessary, and domestics to carry them.’

The walls themselves are covered with inscriptions ; each column and cornice has its appropriate carving. It would take days to do justice to the wonders that can be seen and books to picture their features fully.

One more building remains to be described, perhaps the most noticeable of all. This is the Hall of the Hundred Columns, certainly the largest of the edifices on the platform of Persepolis. It lies close under the mountain, on the same level as the porch of Xerxes, and, as its name implies, originally boasted a hundred columns, set in the form of a gigantic square. Eight doorways, magnificently carved, afford entrance to the great hall, which itself is, alas ! a sad scene of ruin. Everywhere lie heaped and huddled the remains of lofty pillars and massive walls ; luxuriantly carved capitals lie prone by sculptured bases. The earth is

strewn with a pathetic mass of debris. Still, however, stand the gateways, with their wealth of sculpture, here more abundant than anywhere else in Persepolis. On one, the King plunges his dagger into a dragon's side, while the beast in return snatches him by the arm and claws his knees. On another is depicted the King, sitting, staff in hand, supported by a double row of warriors and attended by a slave with a fly-flap. Again, he sits in state, surrounded by guards and attendants, receiving ambassadors from a foreign land, in front of whom are set two smoking censers; beneath, are five rows of warriors armed with spears and all the other paraphernalia of war, fit tribute to the far-reaching power of the monarch seated above; in the air above floats the mystic symbol of God,—the strange, open-winged image with its half-body and grey, reverend head.

Through these courts and gateways I wandered that sunny afternoon, gazing at the images of long days ago, treading the ground trodden by the giants of history, touching the walls brushed by their garments and touched by their flesh. Past the gates of Xerxes with the wonderful Beasts I went, along the terrace of the many figures, up the little low steps to that greatest glory, Xerxes' lofty hall, with the thirteen gaunt pillars standing like white ghosts of the past, and then through the courts of Darius,—the doors sculptured, the windows thick with cuneiform lettering. Down the ornate steps I passed, up more, and into the palace of Xerxes, crumbling and decayed, but still glorious in its ruin. Treading on half-buried, fallen columns, stooping under the tottering architraves, I went on and on until my head whirled with the magnificence of the scene, and my heart thrilled with sadness for the desolation of such great beauty.



THE GATES OF XERXES.—PERSEPOLIS.



CYRUS' TOMB.

It was hard to leave, just realizing what an infinitesimal morsel I had seen, and what volumes could be read from those great stone pages of the past. But the sun was sinking : I had only time for a visit to the north tomb, with its two sepulchres and rounded roof ; for one last look at the splendid vista of steps, rising in a gathering beauty, to be crowned at the summit by the vision of those grim beasts that guard the wonderful terraces, and then I looked my last on Persepolis.

'I saw the solitary Ringdove there,
And "Coo, coo, coo," she cried ; and "Coo, coo, coo."'

The lines haunted my brain as the tall pillars waned and faded, until at length the hill-side hid them from my sight.

CHAPTER XV

THE TOMB OF CYRUS

‘O Man, whosoever thou art, and whensoever thou comest (for I know thou wilt come), I am Cyrus, who founded the Empire of the Persians. Grudge me not, therefore, this little earth that covers my body.’

Inscription stated by Plutarch to have been engraved by order of Alexander on the tomb of Cyrus when it had been violated by Polymachus.

FROM Persepolis my path lay still over classic ground, for the roads between here and Pasargadæ were not only trodden by the great Cyrus himself, but were the scene of Alexander’s military exploits.

The two marches between Persepolis and the city of Cyrus are somewhat arduous. ‘We proceeded on our journey,’ says Le Bruyn of this part of his travels, ‘after fun-fet, and by break of day struck into a road between the mountains that are very lofty and rocky; and the ways are so narrow, that they are hardly passable by horses, and other beasts of burden. They are likewise so steep and slippery in several places, that the poor animals are frequently overthrown with all their load; and they are altogether as fatiguing to travellers, who are not able to fit their horses, and are continually obliged to alight and remount. This place called to my remembrance those defiles, which *Quintus Curtius* says *Alexander* passed in this tract.’

On the first of these marches I set out at seven in

the morning, in the customary sunlight of a Persian day. Before taking to the road in earnest, and in order to let the pack-mules get a good start, and so arrive somewhat at the same time as myself, I paid a visit to a little place of old-world remains which I have not yet described in detail. This was Naksh-i-Rejeb, the tiny sculptured bay in the rocks close to the *chapar khāneh*. The sun peeped over the hill, throwing into shadow two of the three pictures, and making the third stand out in brilliant relief. The first tablet on the south-eastern side represents the scene we have already beheld at Naksh-i-Rustam,—the investiture of Ardeshir by Ormuzd. The second also depicts the god and the King, but this time they are afoot; while the third (that which showed so clean-cut in the morning sunlight) is Shahpur and his Court. In front rides the King, and behind is a row of servitors, with tall 'busby' hats and masses of curly hair, their clasped hands resting on their grounded swords. On the chest of Shahpur's horse are two inscriptions, one in Pehlevi and the other in Greek. Both are exceedingly well preserved, and I photographed and copied them. Here is a copy and translation of what is written there :

ΤΟΠΡΟCΩΠΟΝΤΟΥΤΟΜΑCΔΑCΝΟΥΘΕΟΥ
 CΑΠΩΡΟΥΒΑCΙΑΕΩCΒΑCΙΑΕΩΝ[ΑΡΙΑ]ΝΩΝ
 ΚΑΙΑΝΑΡΙΑΝΩΝΕΚΓΕΝΟΥCΘΕΩ[ΝΕΚΤΟΝΟΥ]
 ΜΑC[ΔΑ]CΝΟΥΘΕΟΥΑΡΤΑΚΑΡCΥ[Ρ][ΒΑCΙΑΕΩC]
 ΒΑCΙΑΕΩΝΑΡΙΑΝΩΝΕΚΓΕΝΟ[ΥCΘΕΩΝ]
 ΕΚΓΟΝΟΥΘΕΟΥΠΑΠΑΚΟΥΒΑCΙΑ[ΕΩC].

'This is the image of the Ormuzd-worshipping God Sapor, King of Kings Arian and non-Arian of the Race of Gods, son of the Ormuzd-worshipping God Artakarsu[r], King of Kings Arian of the Race of Gods, son of the God Papak the King.'

While I was deep in the copying of these inscriptions, there suddenly came down upon me from the

hill-side three Persian girls. They wore no veils, and evinced unashamed interest in what I was doing. Clearly they were of one of the hill-tribes, the black tents of which I could see not far off. With a very un-Persian absence of shyness, they came up to me and entered into conversation. One asked what my camera might be, another what I was doing. The trusty Saif was not by my side, and so I had to struggle to satisfy their curiosity with my very elementary Persian. Two of the young ladies then departed to fetch their respective babies from the camp for me to admire, which, with all the air of a parliamentary candidate canvassing for votes, I dutifully did. The third girl evidently was unmarried, and, by way of improving the occasion, asked me whether I had a wife. I told her, No, whereupon she smiled sweetly, and asked whether I would like to marry her! This was so sudden that my Persian was absolutely unable to rise to the occasion, so I hastily produced my watch, which had the desired effect of interesting both babies and their mothers enormously. I think, in fact, that the young ladies were, if possible, even more taken with it than were their babies, and it was with great reluctance that they let me take it away, when, after a friendly farewell and an inquiry from them whether I would be coming back, I mounted my pony and rode away towards Isfahan.

On our way from Puzeh we made a little detour to inspect the ruins of Istakhr. There is to be found another Takht-i-Taous (the first of that name, it will be remembered, is the stone throne to the west of the *chapar khaneh*), and there, besides, are the bases of pillars, and one whole pillar still standing, and possessed of its twin bull-headed capital. There, also, are some massive fragments of wall, and all around the earth is

littered with pieces of pottery. It seems, indeed, as if excavation should unearth plenty of evidences of the ancient city, although to-day the scene is one of utter desolation. To the south, on the mule track, are the remains of a great gateway, and this, save for some niches in the rock a little further on, is the last of the Achæmenian remains hereabouts. So, passing through the portals, we left Persepolis. There was a feeling of riding out of the past into the present as we went beneath the great archway; the glamour of antiquity fell away, and we were back in a country of deserts and squalor.

To vary the monotony of the march, I used occasionally to make efforts to properly train the little pony which I had bought (after, of course, a huge haggling) from a dealer in Shiraz. He only cost £10, and he was a bargain at the price, for although he had apparently never had a bit in his mouth until the day on which he was reluctantly led round for me to examine, he soon trained into quite a respectable little animal. To-day, I remember, I had got as far as shooting from his back at crows with my pistol, upon which he, at first, generally tried to bolt, but even to this he afterwards became resigned.

A long march is a curious mixture of reflection and action. The interminable hours of travel provoke long and profound reveries, out of which the absorbed mind is startled by some sudden external incident. Thoughts that are wandering among Achæmenian surroundings are suddenly dashed down from their lofty heights to the aggressive presence of some obtrusive Persian or of some evasive beast or bird. Talking of the very spot where I was riding, Malcolm has provided an admirable instance of this sudden descent from the lofty plains of abstract philosophy to the level of con-

crete action. 'The day we left the ruins,' he says, 'Aga Meer, as we were riding together, expressed his surprise at men devoting their time to such pursuits' (as archæology). "What can be the use," said he, "of men travelling so far and running so many risks to look at ruined houses and palaces, when they might stay so comfortably at home?" I replied, with some feeling of contempt for my friend's love of quiet, "If the state of a man's circumstances, or that of his country, does not find him work, he must find it for himself, or go to sleep and be good for nothing. Antiquaries," I continued, "to whose praiseworthy researches you allude, by directing, through their labours and talents, our attention to the great names and magnificent monuments of former days, aid in improving the sentiments and taste of a nation. Besides, although no antiquary myself, I must ever admire a study which carries man beyond self. I love those elevating thoughts that lead me to dwell with delight on the past, and to look forward with happy anticipations to the future. We are told by some that such feelings are mere illusions, and the cold, practical philosopher may, on the ground of their inutility, desire to remove them from men's minds, to make way for his own machinery; but he could as soon argue me out of my existence as take from me the internal proof which such feelings convey, both as to my origin and destination."

"There goes a *goor-kher*" (wild-ass), said Mahomed Beg, the Jelloodar, who was riding close behind; and away he galloped. Away I galloped also, leaving unfinished one of the finest speeches about the past and the future that was ever commenced.'

Our resting-place was Sivand, another little village nestling under tall cliffs, whence, over a ground laid

with hoar-frost, we started at daybreak for Pasargadæ, and soon entered the long pass known as the Tang-i-Turkan, of which Le Bruyn speaks so vigorously. Here, I remember, I lost my haversack. There is a peculiar annoyance about the loss of even the most unimportant article, especially if there is no hope of ever retrieving it, just as there is a ridiculously extravagant delight in finding again the most trumpery object, of whose recovery we have given up all hope. The world is still the woman of the parable when there is a lost piece of silver in question. Even now I sometimes see my little brown haversack lying in the midst of a Persian wilderness, its cartridges sodden, its map decaying, and the small treatise on political economy, which I carried to while away dull moments, wasting its sweetness and gradually strewing its substance on the desert ground. Perhaps, however, a better fate befell it, after all, and the cartridges long ago brought down a duck for some fat Persian's supper, the map is still a much-discussed mystery, and the treatise on political economy, being entirely incomprehensible, has become the creed of some tribal religion.

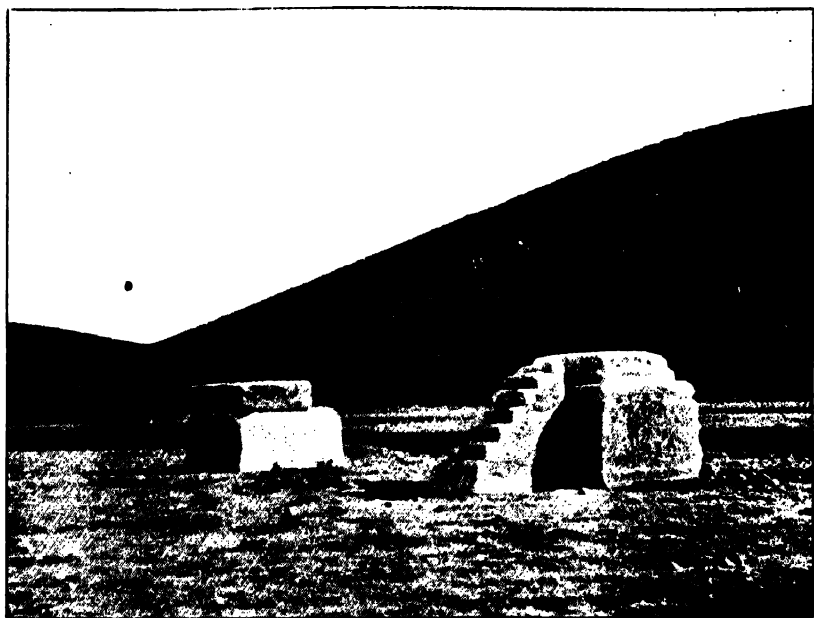
It was in the midst of a scene of striking splendour that I discovered my loss. The track here is cut sheer through the living rock; the river rushes below; great cliffs hang above; and over against the path lies a gloomy mountain. It is a very place of darkness and dread. No wonder that even to-day the villagers people this place with *ghouls* and *deeves*, and have strange stories of weird beasts that snatch the traveller and his goods away to deep dungeons in the rocks.

I rode on a few yards, and suddenly in front there opened out the plain of Murghab, bounded to the far north by snow mountains, and there, shining in the

light of the setting sun, rose the white dot of Cyrus's tomb and the dim ruins of Pasargadæ.

Lord Curzon has dealt so fully with these remains (save for one notable exception, as I shall afterwards point out) that more than a passing note or two would be superfluous.

The first and the most notable object of all that remains of the ancient city of Cyrus is the tomb of the King himself. Desolate and solitary in the surrounding desert, there rises a seven-terraced altar of stone, on the top of which stands the tomb;—a massive, almost square building with a rounded stone roof. Like a green plume, a little bush grows from between the interstices of the stone, while another huddles under the shelter of the south wall. Around lie the ruins of an enclosure, of which the sepulchre itself does not occupy the centre, being slightly to the north thereof. Access is gained to the tomb by a low door, which leads into a tiny stone cell, bare-walled, and with a smoke-blackened roof. There is no trace now of any inscription, although there is no reason to doubt that when Alexander visited the tomb he both found one and left another. It may, indeed, have been where the prayer-niche now is, but I could find no traces of Stolze's 'holes above the door, where inscribed tablets could have been fixed.' So much of the stone has decayed, however, that without inventing tablets it is quite conceivable that the inscriptions might have existed and been either worn away or obliterated by the prayer-niche. There is no furniture to the tomb, save where, on the left, in another niche, are several *chiragha*, or small lamps, and where, at the far end, there is hung a string, from which depend innumerable little offerings, principally tin pots and pans. Close by, in another corner, is a Koran, and, to



STONE ALTARS AT TAKHT-I-GOR.



THE WOMEN'S OFFERINGS -CYRUS' TOMB.

its right, the recessed prayer-niche cut in the stone. Outside, around the enclosure, are the remains of pillars and of three gateways, none of which directly front the door of the tomb. That on the north side once led to a colonnade, the remnants of which are still evident. Close by to the north is a little village, built among ancient remains.

Such is the sepulchre of the King of Kings to-day. But let it not be imagined that its story is known to the inhabitants of the country. No, indeed, that were an historical effort far too great for the present-day Persian. Always he appears to prefer legend to history and superstition to both. So, to-day, the tomb of Cyrus goes in his own land by the name of 'Takht-i-Mader-i-Suleiman' (the 'Tomb of the Mother of Solomon').

After all, what is history to the Persian of to-day? What could it be, indeed, did he realize it, save a reproach? It is little credit to a nation to have a proud past if it has not a worthy present. Still, if from ignorance the Persian were to develop knowledge, and from indifference, interest, his own national records, surely, should do no little to raise his country again to a position of independent prosperity? To-day, however, the people neither know nor care about their history, and their interest centres, not in the records of the past, but in the superstitions of the present. So it comes that the 'Mother of Solomon' is vaguely endowed with Cyrus's sepulchre, and to the supposed presiding deity is ascribed supernatural power. To the tomb come all the Persian maids and matrons who are unhappy in love or who desire continuance of happiness therein. These superstitious and love-sick ladies offer to their goddess, that they may gain their ends, various little trinkets, and it is

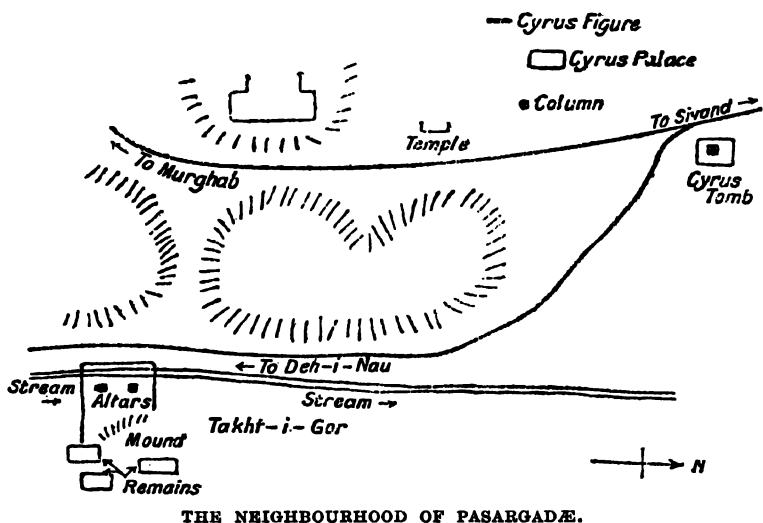
these that we have seen hanging on the cord inside the tomb. Judged by the quality of the gifts, the ends to be gained, or the faith of the votaries, cannot be worth very much.

Needful, indeed, were the simple yet proud words of the King's own inscription on his tomb: 'I, Cyrus, King of Kings, lie here.' Needful, indeed, was Alexander's later inscription, quoted at the beginning of this chapter. Needful, and yet,—so time, with its ironic disregard of great men's wishes, has contrived,—in vain. For the inscriptions have gone, and the tomb, deprived of its rightful owners, has descended to be a shrine for the shabby offerings of an ignorant people to a fabled deity. As I looked upon the clustering mass of rags and tin trumperies, I found myself wondering if Cyrus knew—and whether Cyrus cared.

From the tomb the way lies north-east to the palace of Cyrus. All that remains is a tall unfluted pillar and some masonry. Another pillar lies buried to the north, and there are evidences that here was a considerable building. The ground rises in a mound, which would repay excavation, as would the other mounds on which, in every case, the remains are situated. Even now the feet of carved figures may be seen on portions of the exposed masonry. East of all this rises the solitary block whereon is sculpted the figure of Cyrus, four-winged, and originally surmounted by an inscription, now lost, identifying the figure. North of the palace is a single square column with a cuneiform inscription stating it is the work of Cyrus, and north of this, again, stands one wall of a building, which is at once recognized as similar to the mystifying structure in front of the tombs at Naksh-i-Rustam. In this case the true height, over 40 feet, is apparent.

I climbed up to the still-existent doorway, but could find no niches such as are to be seen in the other building near Persepolis, nor any evidences of the grooves before mentioned, though the usual small groove at an angle of 45 degrees to the doorway, and presumably connected with the manipulation of a stone door, is plainly visible.

I may mention that, in addition to the other differences touched on between the two structures in question, the doorstep in that at Pasargadæ is on a



THE NEIGHBOURHOOD OF PASARGADÆ.

level with the indicated floor, while at Naksh-i-Rustam it either was always at a lower level or has disappeared.

To-day there is only a solitary wall left standing, and I was struck by the apparent impossibility of such gigantic blocks of stone as were used in the construction of this building at Pasargadæ having utterly vanished, leaving the small amount of debris visible on the plain. This fact it is which inclines me to suspect that in the apparently solid mass of masonry which

forms the base of the similar 'temple' at Naksh-i-Rustam there may be concealed a hidden chamber. Certainly the mystery of these two buildings is a fascinating one, and any excavation or examination which should solve it would be interesting and important.

North of the ruin just described is found the great terrace, known now as Takht-i-Suleiman, partly buried in the hill-side, but still, in spite of the ravages of time and man, a splendid work. Here, again, excavation might disclose much.

There remains one notable evidence of ancient handiwork, which I have not seen mentioned even in Lord Curzon's exhaustive account of Pasargadæ.

Far to the west—perhaps a mile—behind a little hill, are two most curious structures, close to a small and artificial-looking mound, and between it and the hill. A stream flows close under the latter, and on the other side of this stand what look like two colossal altars, one of which is led up to by a detached flight of steps hewn out of another enormous stone.

On closer inspection these huge relics prove hollow—each is one stone, the interior of which has been removed, but left, it would appear, without entrance, the side whence the excavation had been made being turned downwards. Now, however, a piece has been forcibly broken out of the side of each, exposing the interior. They stand in what, from the ruined remains of walls, must have been a large enclosure.

I found on inquiry that the place was called Takht-i-Gor—Gor in this case being apparently a lady's name.

Of these curious objects and of their surroundings I made a minute examination, and I found, moreover, the plain to be strewn with undoubted remains of

ancient buildings. There would seem, indeed, to have been some sort of a palace, or even a city, here in the past.

As to the two monoliths: without pretending to any archæological ability, I would venture to suggest that they were indeed altars either for fire-worship or for sacrifices.

My home for the night was a little mud outhouse in the village of Deh-i-Nau. A horse had been turned out to make room for me, and the only outlet for smoke (it was a bitter night) was by the cracks of the door, through which, apparently, more cold air came in than fumes got out. I had, however, begun to appreciate the presence of four walls of any kind, and to consider a roof even of mud and straw a thing to be devoutly thankful for.

CHAPTER XVI

A MOUNTAIN RACE

‘The happy man’s without a shirt.’

JOHN HEYWOOD.

TO-DAY we met one of the Persian postmen, and to him I entrusted a letter to my late host at Shiraz, which, I afterwards heard, reached its destination without hitch or delay. Of this I was very glad, for, to put it in Saif’s way, he had, indeed, been very ‘considerable’ to us, and to his ‘considerableness’ (or should it be ‘considerability’?) I owed a great deal.

It is little use writing letters on the march in Persia—there is nowhere to post them. Still, there is just a chance that occasionally there may come along one of the riders who carry the mails to and fro between the principal cities, and to him, if you cannot afford to wait till the next post-town and are sufficiently confiding, you may entrust your correspondence. But it is well in Persia never to put too much trust in your letter, under any circumstances, arriving at its destination within any specified time, and never to count upon receiving a letter yourself at all. It is not improbable, too, that, in the rare event of the receipt of one, others will have taken an earlier opportunity than yourself of looking inside the envelope. These, however, are details when civilization is a memory and England a hazy vision.

The road from Deh-i-Nau to our night's *munzil* was the dreariest I had yet struck in Persia, lying as it did among grey and brown undulations, which cut off all view, and seemed interminable in their monotonous convolutions. Lord Curzon tells of 'an English trout stream' which 'rushes out into the plain,' but I took the wrong path to meet with it. So I was left alone with my own thoughts and the uninspiring scenery.

There come moments, I believe, in the lives of most of us when there rushes over the mind a sudden conviction of the utter vanity of existence. It comes sometimes in the early morning hours, when the bustle of the day has not yet begun, and the whole mental and physical fabric is below par. It comes again in soulless and sordid places and conditions, and sometimes it comes with utter fatigue at the end of a hard yet unprofitable day. Always it seems to descend upon the mind with a curious, sudden vividness, an abrupt sense that we are all moving uselessly and inexorably on, nearer and nearer a certain doom. It is like some living nightmare in its appalling horror. In these dreary valleys under the grey sky I remember that feeling seized me with the same strange sense of newness, although I recognized it as an old enemy. There is only one way to throw it off, and that is work. Work with the body or work with the brain, it does not matter which, but active distraction of some kind, the more violent the better. Then after a time the soul, so to speak, struggles to the surface and breathes again.

In this case, I did the only thing that seemed possible to relieve the horrid tediousness of plodding on my solitary path through the endless vista of brown and grey. I got off, fed my pony, and ate a piece of

chocolate ! Not much distraction, but it sufficed, and it was with renewed activity of mind and body that I set off on the road again. At last there came a break in the grim succession of earth-folds, and I was soon climbing down into a great plain girt with hills of snow. There below was the caravanserai of Khaneh Zerghoon, and in a little I was resting my limbs in the bare, whitewashed rest-room.

Down from the mountains and their summer quarters there had come into this caravanserai a whole tribe of that hill race, the Iliats. Every nook or corner had its inhabitant, and their belongings filled every chance space that was left empty of humanity. The scene, indeed, was such that, as I sat in my little mud room and looked out on it, I was inspired to jot down my impressions.

‘The devil of a row.

‘Children, calves, lambs, puppies, kids, all in the most abundant profusion ; all apparently in the extreme of youth and for that reason the noisier ; all maliciously and purposelessly interfering with each other ; children dragging puppies about by the neck ; lambs worrying kids ; calves stepping on both ;—everything productive of one discordant clamour. The sun just peeps over the caravanserai wall and shows as mixed a scheme of colour as there is of sound. Predominant is black ;—the cloaks of the men, the great Iliat tent blankets, the saucepan hats, the deep shadows of the caravanserai arches—the eyes of the girls. Then red ;—the women’s shawls, the small boys’ kerchiefs ; and after that the various greens, browns, and yellows of the stable-household-farmyard, which is my abiding-place.

‘Best of all the Persians I love the Iliats. They are a rough, rude mountain race, with all the blunt



ILIATS IN A CARAVANSERAI.

independence of free men. The women, unveiled, bold, sometimes fiercely man-like, with a proud indifference, a defiant audacity, seem very delightful in a country of timorous subjugation and veiled vice. The children are just little devils,—all the spirits of the street arab with the wild untamedness of his true namesake,—hardy, full of life, fearless.

‘These last are playing a game when I look out. In the centre of the caravanserai court there lies, heaped up upon the litter-covered ground, what appears to be a collection of the formless black coats the Persian never seems to be without. From this issues a short string grasped by one boy, who can thus run round the mass of coats within a limited area. Three other young Iliats are each furnished with a weapon best described as a hard bunch of cloth tied to the end of a cord about 2 feet long. This they incessantly whirl round their head like a sling, until, seizing their opportunity, one dashes in and strikes the coats a sounding whack with his flagellator—evading dexterously the “captive’s” efforts to touch him. This goes on for about a quarter of an hour, when, on their stopping, to my amazement the seemingly inanimate mass in the centre gives a heave. What is coming out? Can it be a prostrate mule after all? No; at length from the recesses of the coats emerges a hot and dusty little ragamuffin, clearly relieved at gaining the open air and taking his turn outside, while in creeps one of his companions.

‘I take a photograph, after some difficulty in collecting a group representative, as far as possible, of all the species which inhabit the place. The ladies at first are obdurate, but eventually “come in,” obviously blushing as far as their complexions will admit, though one, curiously European-looking, is so coy that I have,

out of pure "cussedness," to take a separate one of her, unawares.

'Directly I say, "*Bus; shuda ast*" ("It is over"), they all rush up and want to see the picture! I explain,—to their disappointment. The men are very keen on my going out on the hills shooting to-morrow, but I cannot spare a day. However, I show them my rifle, and they bring forth one of theirs for my opinion. Mine impresses them much, the more when I knock a small stone off the top of the wall with a shot from it. Then one man makes quite a sporting offer. He will tie up a hen, and if I can hit it at a hundred yards I shall have it—if not I pay him ten *shahis* ($2\frac{1}{2}$ d.). Farmyard fowls are not noble game, but it means skill and supper, so I take his wager, and, later, the chicken.

'I have not done with my Iliats for to-night yet. I am glad I am getting used to Persian ways, or I might misconstrue them and be rude! For, as I sit writing in my bare little room, the door suddenly opens, and a tall man wanders into the room and stands there dumbly looking at me. I know pretty well by now what to expect, but look up and ask him, "What is it?"

"*Hich*" is his oracular response, and he continues to blankly gaze. I am quite prepared to find he wants "nothing," and know he means no harm, so, as he does not disturb me, I do not hurt his feelings by ordering him out, but calmly resume my writing. After a moment or so, another sudden entrance and another dumb spectator. Again: "*Chist?*" Again the reply, "*Hich*," and again I continue. But when a third individual joins the two blankly gazing Iliats in front of me, I feel it time to interfere and ask them rather pointedly if I can do anything for them and

why they have come. They look at one another as if telepathically considering the matter, and at last one bursts out: "*Tamasha mikunem*" ("We have come to see the sight"). Then one remarks that I write nicely, and I get up and in my politest Persian ask them to be pleased to remove themselves. They go at once, filing stoically out without the slightest indication of an expression of any kind on their faces—and I set to again.

'But not for long. A man makes the ordinary unceremonious entrance who really has some business: viz., a pain in, to be polite, his lower chest. With a great show of consideration I give him a rhubarb pill and full instructions for the use thereof, with a few little extras of my own respecting a draught of hot water before bed, etc.

'Back to work. Confound—another man:—my fame must be spreading. "What is it?" "May Allah protect you, I have a pain in my head, and I drink too much water." H'm! Another rhubarb pill, with slightly varied instructions, and he is disposed of.

'But I am to have no peace to-night. Almost immediately there enters a tall, mournful-looking man, who explains that he, too, has a headache, and in addition cannot eat properly.

'I am getting a little impatient. Two rhubarb pills, and he must drink hot water to-night and to-morrow morning.

'Just as I really think I am going to settle down I look up, and there before me see a young woman with a child in her arms. I must confess I am not prepared for this—Persian ladies do not generally pay unchaperoned visits to the rooms of travelling bachelors—their particularly cautious male relatives see to that

very carefully. However, I recover my presence of mind, and, when I can remember enough Persian, ask her to sit down. She promptly does so—on the floor, after punctiliously shutting the door. Then she announces that her baby drinks too much water. This does not sound a serious complaint. I then begin to collect data. Beginning at the beginning, I ask her how old she is. "Twenty, Sahib." "And how long have you had a husband?" As she replies "thirty years" to this, I presume she thought I was asking how old her husband was. "How old is the baby?" "A year." I know nothing of babies, but after thinking over various innocuous medicines, eventually decide on half a rhubarb and soda tabloid, since I cannot break a rhubarb pill. Then come the conditions, far the most important part to a Persian. "When am I to give it?" I told her to-night. "All of it?" "Yes." "Powdered?" "Yes." (How on earth does she expect the infant to swallow it whole without choking?) "How am I to give it?" "In anything warm." "Milk?" "Yes, in anything you like." And then, as the conversation gets too deep for my powers of Persian, I politely bow the patient and its mother out into the night—not without vague reminiscences of a scene in Sterne's "Sentimental Journey."

'Next morning.

'Really this is too much. I am not able to perform many ablutions, but the ones I do go through require, to put it mildly, a certain *deshabille*. It is unfortunate that the only light to my room is admitted via the door, which consequently has to be left partially open at all times; still, I must say, I did not expect, even after last night, to meet, when I turned round

for the towel, the gaze of the coy young lady who had such an unconquerable dislike to being photographed, and who is calmly standing inside the door evidently much interested in me. I secure the towel, and beg her to depart, which she reluctantly does, to reappear, with suspicious punctuality, on the completion of my toilet. It appears that her unnatural pallor is due to a disease for which I can do nothing. However, I give her a rhubarb pill for luck, and leave her not wholly desolate.'

Such are some of the little incidents in a Persian traveller's everyday life; a life which may be rough, but which is certainly full of quaint experiences.

I had a real liking for my companions in the caravanserai, and I wished I could go shooting with them, as they so heartily invited me to, but time would not allow, and after many assurances that I had, as the Persians put it, 'come happily'—in which even my disappointed opponent in the wager joined, I pushed on across the plain.

CHAPTER XVII

WINTER AND ROUGH WEATHER

‘It ain’t no use to grumble and complain ;
It’s jest as cheap and easy to rejoice ;
When God sorts out the weather and sends rain,
W’y, rain’s my choice.’

JAMES WHITCOMB RILEY.

WE had arrived at what is popularly known, I believe, as the coldest place on the plateau of Persia ; and, by the ordering of Fate, it was precisely here that we were favoured with quite the worst weather I chanced on in my travels.

All went well for the greater part of the first march after leaving my friends, the Iliats. I walked the whole fourteen miles on the chance of sport, but bagged not a single living thing. That there is game here I can vouch, since at the beginning of the day I saw some pigeons in the distance, followed and lost them, but at the same time blundered on a flock of duck, unluckily out of range. These I next tracked ; but just as I was approaching the place I suspected them to have made for, I spied, immediately ahead, two wolves sneaking off. Kishna was twenty yards behind ; I signalled silently to him. He ran up, and they, taking alarm, were far away before I got hold of my weapon, while at that moment, warned that something was happening, up got the duck from a little creek fifty yards ahead, squawking and splattering.

Persian swearing is more thorough and erudite than English, but it is not so solid and satisfactory.

The rest of the way was a weary plod over bleak desert, and I arrived at Dehbid glad to get to my night's home, and still more glad to find there a hospitable official of the Telegraphs and his charming wife.

Dinner off a tablecloth again !

Apparently Dehbid is a fairly difficult place to live in. Besides being, as Lord Curzon calls it, 'the coldest inhabited place in Persia,' it also can boast of having practically no inhabitants and no supplies. In fact, its name, 'There was a village' (*deh*, a village; *būd*, was) very fairly represents it, the chief object of interest being a large mass which first appears to be a rock, but which turns out to be the remains of a fort.

What inhabitants there are, seem to be among the biggest rogues in Persia, to judge by the stories I was told. Bullets have whistled round the telegraph office ; Europeans have been robbed ; a missionary not so long ago was beaten, stripped, and left on the road ; —my hosts themselves were once attacked and their caravan partly looted, only one robber being captured and sent to Shiraz to be blown from the cannon's mouth. Truly a nice neighbourhood !

Next day I found that the inhabitants had apparently been giving a special exhibition of their talents for my particular benefit. During the night they had cut open boxes, extracted several of the articles therein, had taken my horse out of his stable, robbed him of his blanket, and turned him loose in the plain, whence, luckily, he was retrieved by Saif early next morning.

There had been a little rain the day before, and to-day, evidently, they were preparing behind the scenes of the sky for something more definitely dis-

gusting. A bitter wind arose. Ominous clouds gathered to the south-east, and, just as I was making for the road a few miles on our march from an excursion after a wolf, down came the veil of the storm. The mules had gone on ahead, and, wandering through the driving blizzard, it was some time before I got a glimpse of the welcome line of telegraph-poles, of which I had prudently taken the bearings by my compass, having no wish to emulate those travellers who in like circumstances have been found dead a week or two afterwards in the desert. Soon afterwards I dimly saw forms through the snow,—Saif and one of my muleteers, who had been left behind to inquire into the robbery. Nothing had been recovered;—but I had expected that nothing would.

On we plodded down a dreary pass through the storm, until, at length, we sighted a lonely collection of huts and a white caravanserai, which marked Khoneh Khoreh, and cantered in, to find that the mules which started an hour before us had not arrived. We had not passed them. Even with that blizzard blowing I was sure of that. Where had they disappeared to? I asked whether there were two roads;—apparently there were, so we comforted ourselves as best we could with the thought that our baggage might have taken the other way, and made ourselves as cheery as might be in the empty mud hut with a fire. Outside the snow still drove relentlessly along, and when, after an hour, no sign of the mules was apparent, I sent out two horsemen to scout for them; one back towards Dehbid, the other down the branch road to Yezd.

Two hours;—still no news of the mules, and darkness was closing in. Three;—then our horsemen returned without tidings. Four,—and I prepared for

a night in damp clothes and a dinner of what could be obtained in the tiny village. First there was the question of warmth. Clad in snow-drenched clothes, and lying in a draughty room, sleep seemed no easy matter. At last I acquired a carpet and a blanket, and, with a fire, things did not look so bad. As to food, there was nothing in the little village besides four eggs, some bread, a peculiar kind of cheese, and a substance like *biltong*, composed of dried meat. I ordered some of each. Presently it came in the hands of the *farrash*, or caravanserai attendant;—the cheese bore trace of having been moulded or rolled by the said hands, likewise the *biltong*. The bread was in large flat discs, and was extremely salt; the eggs could not be pronounced on at the moment, but I ordered them to be boiled and hoped for the best. Dinner was ready. Sitting on the carpet, Saif and I ate, while Kishna, in an excess of sybaritism, toasted the bread. The procedure was as follows: I grasped one side of a toasted disc of bread, Saif the other, and we pulled. Then I detached a piece of cheese, a curious white substance, from the main mass with my fingers; the *biltong* was subjected to a like process. We were all ravenous; we had had nothing but a morsel of breakfast for twenty-four hours. The eggs, I remember, turned out well, and we reserved one and a piece of bread for the next morning. Then making up the fire, I took off my boots and prepared to wrap myself up in the carpet for the night.

It was nine o'clock when all of a sudden the door opened, letting in a blast of icy wind. The small boy who had lent me the carpet popped his head in, subjecting me to severe physical discomfort from the bitter draught (the door did not fit the doorway, and fell open now and then, but it was better than nothing).

‘What is it?’ I asked.

‘The mules.’

I slipped on my boots and went into the snow. It certainly was the mules. In a few moments the muleteer was explaining;—he took the Yezd road and went fifteen miles before finding his mistake. Joy at their appearance, and the fact that they had had a long and extremely hard march, prevented even ‘Saif from descending upon their heads in wrath for having been fools enough, as he put it, to ‘mislay the road,’ and soon I was contemplating with a relief I can scarcely describe—my bed. Truly one must lose a thing to appreciate it properly. Poor little Mr. Stumps rushed in, cold and hungry; he had had a hard day, and deserved the hearty dinner I watched him eat. Then (thank goodness, by this time dry) he curled himself up on my bed, and had hardly buried his nose in his fur before he was asleep, as, shortly afterwards,—and with a deep thankfulness that I was under my own woolly blankets instead of wrapped up in a carpet on the floor,—was I also.

CHAPTER XVIII

THE BEGGARS

‘Have pity upon me, have pity upon me, O ye my friends ; for the hand of God hath touched me.’—*Job* xix. 21.

PUT it what way you will, in the end there can be only one true object in life—to increase the happiness of the world ; and in proportion as a man does this, so may he be said to have fulfilled his purpose. It is possible to attain this end in a positive or a negative way, for it is possible either to increase happiness or to diminish pain ; but to diminish pain is, after all, only another way of increasing happiness.

The main point is that if, when he comes to die, a man can think that, during his life, the credit side of the world’s balance-sheet of joy and sorrow has benefited by his presence here ; or, better still, that he has added something to the permanent store of human happiness, then he may close his account with the satisfying consciousness that in his case, at all events, life has not been a failure.

There are, of course, a thousand ways whereby we may set about our business of increasing happiness. First of all, we may be happy ourselves (has not Stevenson told us that it is a better thing to find a happy man or woman than a five-pound note ?), and, by being so, we can not only add that little mite to the great total, but can be sure the effect will not be lost

on others beside, for true happiness is not attained without much else that is good.

Then, again, we may be the direct cause of happiness. We may create great works of art; write immortal books; compose, or play, or sing divine music;—leave, in fact, something that will not only give pleasure to others in our own day, but be a source of joy for the generations that are to come. We may invent processes and machines which shall enable a man to save his body from unnecessary fatigue, or which shall supply the world with comforts hitherto unknown. There is, indeed, practically no end to the way by which, with our brains or our bodies, we can aid the life of the world by the removal of sorrow or the addition of happiness. But perhaps there are no more noble or efficient instruments in this great cause of humanity than statesmanship, by which can be bettered the condition of whole peoples; and science, particularly medical science, by whose means all mankind is gradually more and more relieved from its burden of disease and pain.

In Persia there is an ample field for both the statesman and the scientist. Social disorder and bodily disease oppress the common welfare like some stifling cloud, while the soul of the people and the resources of the land lie alike uncared for and uncultivated. There is a vast load of unnecessary pain and sorrow to be removed; there are wide fields of unexploited happiness waiting for the hand of man to develop their potentialities. Persia is essentially a place of neglected opportunity and undisturbed decay; there is much material there for the man who wishes to work out his life to the full.

The pressing need is for legislation and administra-

tion that shall deal with the political condition of the people ; and for science and sanitation, which shall remedy their physical maladies.

It would seem, indeed, with regard to these needs, that we are scarcely in a position to offer criticism or advice. With, as the outcome of our system of civilization, slums which a Persian beggar would shrink from ; with, as the result of our physical conditions of life, diseases which are the peculiar product of our special conditions, and which are often, indeed, created by ourselves in some complex process of a twentieth-century trade, we surely can have little to suggest to a country where the social condition of the people, if unsatisfactory, is at all events simple ; and where disease, if prevalent, is at least uncomplicated by the ingenuity of man.

Our defects, however, arise largely from our difficulties, and from those difficulties Persia is in a great measure free. In Persia there is a so much better chance for a happier state of affairs than there is in our England of great cities and complex problems. Matters are so much easier there, in a land which suffers only from ignorance and apathy, and has not, in addition, to contend with what are almost impossibly intricate conditions. Such a land might be so good ; it could be set right so simply. It needs only a few great men and a few great measures ; it is all very pathetic. Yet to-day, where there might be clean, wholesome cities, there are places which as nearly approach to slums as their circumstances permit. In a land where a house would last a man twice as long as in England, and would be twice as habitable, the only habitations to be seen are mud huts. The advantages of a climate which almost compels to health are annihilated by uncleanness of living

which inevitably leads to disease, and by a sanitary system which is so far abandoned to individual unconcern that each house drains its refuse into a pit over which it stands. Untrammelled by our problems of master and workman, there is no industry in the whole of Persia which is a conspicuous success; and, even in the absence of any of the horrors of our great cities, there has been developed a class of poor as penniless as the lowest of the submerged tenth in England to-day.

The ubiquitousness of poverty is only rivalled by that of disease, and their joint consequence is that mendicancy, like stealing and doing nothing, has become one of the recognized professions in Persia, and is a patent and appalling evil in every city and by every wayside.

The beggars—it is they who appeal most to the imagination and the pity of the traveller; it is they who are the most striking advertisement that there is something rotten in the state of Persia.

All day they stand in the sunshine or in the showers, their backs patiently resting against the long lines of brown walls. All day the blind wait, gazing with upturned faces and blind eyes into the night of noon. The cripples sit hunched up; the palsied lie where they have been put, stark beneath some sheltering angle. The aged creep and crawl feebly about, crying for alms, that the dying light of their life may be allowed to flicker itself out in peace. I remember, and shall always remember, Verestschagin's picture in the Tretiakoff Gallery at Moscow which so vividly pictures a sunny wallful of these poor fragments of humanity. At night they wander, or are taken, home to huddle themselves in some corner, and dream through the darkness into another day.

Such are their lives—such they themselves. The mind vainly tries to conceive what they are for—what is the object of existences which have no use and so little enjoyment. No wonder Omar cried a despairing creed :

‘ And that inverted Bowl we call The Sky,
Whereunder crawling coop’t we live and die,
•Lift not thy hands to *It* for help—for *It*
Rolls impotently on as Thou or I.’

Could there be any other conclusion for the Persian beggar (or the English beggar either) ?

There is a curious ironic horror about the life of the poor in Persia. If you are destitute, it is as well to be also diseased. The loss of an eye, the paralysis of the limbs, the infirmities of age—all these are assets from which money can be made.

‘ Have pity upon me, have pity upon me, O ye my friends,’ cries the beggar in very truth, ‘ for the hand of God hath touched me.’

One particular visit from the poor of Persia remember very vividly. As I sat in the *chapar khaneh* at Surmek, the next resting-place after Khoneh Khoreh, Stumps suddenly barked. I looked up, and there, at the door, was a blind old man led by a wee creature of a few years old ; a beautiful little girl. They were a strange, pathetic couple, the sightless old man and his tiny guide and guardian. The mite said nothing, but looked mutely appealing from beneath her long-lashed eyes. She was shivering, and the little red lips quivered with the cold. Inside, I had a fire, so inside they came, with a curious absence of constraint or comment. From beginning to end the child uttered not a word ; but, while she warmed her icy hands before the blaze, her father conversed with me with courteous Persian readiness.

At last the girl's lips ceased to tremble, and her hands lost their numbness, and then I gave them two *kran*s, and they went out into the sunlight—the sunlight that he had never seen.

Persia is no place for the tender-hearted, there is too much to grieve over;—at least, it is too obvious. Probably there is just as much in England; but here we have a way of hiding it away where it is not seen, and most of the world goes on its path quite untroubled and untroubling. Yet, after all, perhaps it is a matter of temperament, and the tender-hearted can live neither in England nor in the East, but their lives are made sadly uneasy. Indeed, this world itself would seem no place for one whose heart is torn by the sorrows of life; to whom the beggar by the wayside, the drunkard in the gin-shop, the drab on the pavement, are matters not merely observed, but grieved over. The thick-skinned fellow has the best of it. On his tough hide the miseries of life shoot their darts harmlessly, he pursues his path serene and well assured that 'God's in His heaven, all's right with the world.'

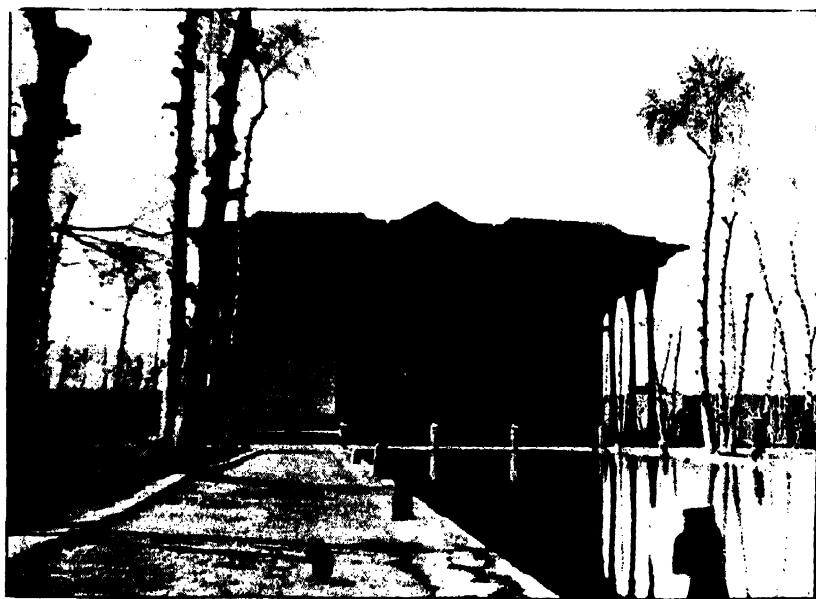
Yet, does he, after all, do so much for that world as his less pachydermatous brother? Is it possible to do good in the absence of a comprehension of the evil to be remedied? Is happiness to be diffused where unhappiness is unrecognized and uncared for?

Perhaps, too, the balance is not so uneven, after all, between the thick and the thin of hide; for, just as a man is more alive to sorrow, so do his finer feelings appreciate more keenly joys as well; and, maybe, unless he is an unbalanced emotionalist, the sensitive man is as well, or better, off than his fellow, to whom life is a matter of beef and beer and boisterousness, or a place of selfish aloofness.

Perhaps the moral is that the extreme is an evil on



BEGGARS.



IN THE PALACE GROUNDS—ISFAHAN.
(With Mr. Stumps in foreground.)

either side ;—again, we reach our *aurea mediocritas* ;—something between horny-hidedness and hysteria.

But to get back to Persia. What can be done ?

Can we do anything ?

The maxim, which it would be a good thing if many earnest Imperialists and devoted humanitarians would more frequently call to mind, is that ‘Charity begins at home.’ This is not a narrow precept. It is, indeed, part of the widest creed possible, the creed which takes as its primary motive the advancement of human happiness. All it means is that very frequently the surest way to add to the happiness of mankind is to add to the happiness of those who are at hand and who can be most certainly and most copiously benefited. Nor must it be forgotten that the doing of this renders a very actual service, and confers a very real benefit upon the rest of the world. It supplies an excellent example.

No doubt, then, we may take every opportunity of giving to others what we have attained of knowledge and experience. We can send them doctors and show them in some ways the fruits of long practice in statecraft ; but it is a duty to ourselves and it will be a benefit to the rest of the world, if before, or, at all events, while, we concern ourselves in the affairs of others, we set our own house in order. Let us help ourselves, and we may be certain we shall be helping others.

What is more, with the best intentions in the world, we cannot do very much towards the regeneration of Persia. That must come from within. It must come by Persian men and Persian measures, and it must be accompanied by a development of a new spirit in the Persian nation. Perhaps what is most urgently needed at the present moment is a strong and wise statesman.

National feeling frequently needs forcibly awaking, and, even when it is roused from slumber, it needs a centre or focussing-point to render it really potent. That rousing force and that focussing-point are alike to be found in the personality of a great man. The national potentialities may be lying latent, only waiting for a leader to excite them into action.

The present moment seems, indeed, the opening of a new era in Persia. Events have recently happened which may mean fresh life for the country, if they are only followed up with wisdom and energy. A peaceful revolution has come about, which, in its results, may be as far-reaching, or even more far-reaching, than that great peaceful revolution which happened in England in 1832. The Persian nation is on its trial. The tools of responsible government are lying to the people's hand. It remains to be seen whether they will grasp them and use them well. If they do so, there is national future for Persia. If they do not, they will cast away the hopes of their native country, and with them those of the whole East.

Behind the people of Persia is a long history of selfish autocracy. Around them is a state fertile in ignorance, poverty, and disease. Before them are vast possibilities. To the beggar, to the shepherd, to the merchant, to all from highest to lowest in the land, their hope lies in the experiment which will be worked out in the next few years. That experiment, moreover, needs a great character, or more than one great character, to bring it to a successful conclusion. Thus Persia must work out her own salvation. The rest of the world can only pray that the men and measures will be adequate thereto.

One last word. Looking upon the whole scheme of things, as it were from above or outside, it is obvious

that Persia, like certain other countries, lags behind in the march of progress. But the march must not stop because of that. Those in front, while always ready to lend a helping hand where they can, must fulfil their duties as pioneers of progress. The chief among these duties—and at the same time, perhaps, the most helpful of all helping hands, is the business which lies before every nation of finding, by practical efforts at national self-improvement, the way farther forward to that great end of life itself, the happiness of humanity.

CHAPTER XIX

SOME SHOOTING AMONG THE HILLS

‘There be some sports are painful.’

SHAKESPEARE : *The Tempest*, III. i. 1.

PERHAPS the most enjoyable sport I have ever had was that which Fate and the kindness of a Persian village chief granted me while I was at Surmek. Certainly it was the hardest, and never shall I forget the sufferings my poor limbs went through for nearly a week after the occasions on which I went in pursuit of ibex and moufflon among the mountains.

When I rode into the little village, late in the evening though it was, the Khan courteously came round to receive me, and said that ‘Insh’allah,’ we would shoot to-morrow, if I cared to. I need hardly say that I accepted his invitation with gratitude and alacrity, and by so doing obtained no little experience and excitement.

I shall always look back upon the days I spent in this little place as among the most delightful in my travels, and on the genial young man of fifty (for so I am compelled to call one whose energy, spirits, and youth of heart utterly belied the evidence of mere years) as one of the most charming and courteous of the persons whose friendship I made in Persia.

As I wrote while they were fresh in my memory

detailed accounts of the two days' hunting I enjoyed, I will let my diary here speak for itself.

'Morning dawns brightly, and I am up early, to wait long for my friend, the Khan. I walk up and down in the sun on the mud roof of the stables just outside my *bala-khaneh*, gaze at the magnificent line of snow mountains, and endeavour to get warm. At length up comes the jolly old chap—a keen, energetic sportsman, despite his “bump of gastronomy,” his fifty years, and his grey hairs.

'A string of salutations, a mutual inspection of rifles, and we are off;—in front, his son and another man, armed as if for a campaign, and both mounted on the same horse, a sturdy, white animal which does not seem in the least affected by its double load, but goes curvetting unconcernedly along; then the Khan himself, his rifle (one barrel 12-bore, the other .450) slung over his shoulder in a way I can never manage, as it seems to need a peculiar natural formation of body; then myself, gun in hand, on my pony; while the rear is brought up by Saifullashah on a *yabu*, and Kishna carrying my rifle, on a mule. This last is the cause of our progress being much retarded, the mule not, apparently, having ever moved out of a walk before.

'The morning is occupied by various vain efforts after a flock of moufflon, which we spy silhouetted on the sky-line of a mountain. Our forces are scattered over hill and plain with a view to the outwitting of this little company; but they are too clever for us, burst through at a point where our defences are weak, and, despite a long shot or two after their scurrying forms, get safe away.

'After this, the Khan asks if I have had enough, saying we can try one piece of stalking in the hills, but that as night is falling it will be cold. I say, if

there will be light, let us go,—and we do go,—all but Saif, whom I dispatch home, as he is obviously very bored.

‘After half an hour’s ride, steadily upward, we reach a gully steeply running up to the north-east, apparently into the heart of the mountain. Here we dismount, I and the Khan start up the gully, the son and Kishna lead off the horses round the foot of the hills. The gully is quite easy to negotiate, and delightfully picturesque. Not a trace of green anywhere, only the grey little shrubs and the great grey mountains towering above us;—over all a solemn silence. The sun is behind the hills to the north-west, and though the summits of the peaks to our right are bathed in his beams, we walk up a valley of shadows. My guide stops,—points to the shingly sand beneath what was, once upon a time, a waterfall. There, clear enough and made to-day, are the “pugs” of a panther. “*Pulang*,” smiles the Khan.

‘On up the barren glen;—here and there a cautious advance ending in a peep round a corner or over a rock, to find nothing; till a great heap of shale, from which we see stretched before us, far beneath, in the light of the setting sun the valley to the north-east, announces that we have reached the summit of the gully, and we prepare to retrace our steps. First, however, a detour to the right to peep round a corner at a little offshoot of the main valley. The Khan looks over, then bobs down with a hasty gesture for silence and stillness. I lie quiet as a mouse. Then he whispers, “*Shikar*—straight ahead—on the hill—look!” I take off my *topee* and peep over. There, outlined against the sky, I see a solitary form—a deer of some kind. I lower myself again and dumbly nod. “Very far,” whispers the Khan. “Never mind. Can I get

a little higher?" I whisper back. We creep cautiously up till, though we are not much nearer, we are almost on a level with the animal—still unconsciously feeding,—and then we come to a low wall of roughly piled up stones. I look through a crack,—the little form (really only a couple of hundred yards away) looks very small. However, I push the barrel of the rifle through, and, after a steady aim, press the trigger.

'Nothing happens—I have not turned over the safety catch.

'This remedied, I again press.

'As the report echoes away down the glen the hill-side below my mark seems to wake to life, and against the dark background I see small black shapes moving. Ibex;—I had not seen the herd, and chose the most difficult shot I could have. However, now I see them, and, thank goodness, they have not found whence the shot came, for, instead of disappearing over the ridge in front, they make up the hill to the left. The light is atrocious. The sun is directly behind the hill, and over the sights the faint black forms are scarcely visible as they clamber up the steep rocks. Keeping under cover, I fire shot after shot at the ascending ibex, till I must have got rid of half a dozen cartridges, with the visible result of one ibex laid out and another wounded and making back to the east. I turn my attention to him, but, already out of range, he speedily disappears over a crest. Then I get up and run to finish off the beast that lies among the rocks. "*Tamasha, sahib, tamasha*," says the highly excited Khan, who has shot and missed. "*Tamasha bibin*—see the sight." And taking my hunting-knife from me, he *halals* the wretched animal.

'Then we look about. Plenty of blood, some leading

over the hill behind. I follow the tracks, and do not have to go far. Just round a pretty stiff corner I come upon the victim. He is lying down not a yard away in a niche in the rocks, his mouth open (I find out why presently), his eyes closed, his head on his fore-paws. I take him for dead, and am just turning to tell the Khan, when, with a startled glance, he is off round the corner.

‘But a hundred yards away he comes into sight, and in a lovely light I give him a shot behind the shoulder which sends him helplessly toppling from rock to rock down the hill-side, to lie very still under a bush fifty feet below.

‘I have wounded one more, but, after toiling up the cliffs till the Khan is almost ill, and has to explain he has heart disease or something, we are forced to give up hope of finding him, and return to grapple with the problem of disposing of the two we have. I have hit both twice—the first in the quarters and leg; the second has his jaw broken (whence his open mouth) and is shot through the heart.

‘With the help of a *tufangchi* we clean the animals and cart them down the hill-side, whither the horses have been brought, where we dispose them on Kishna’s mule.

‘A photograph of the lot, and we move off just as the sun sinks behind the line of snow mountains, changing them from a glory of white to a black wall, with wonderful purple shadows and hollows, clean-cut against the yellow sky.

‘*Next Day.*

‘I have arranged to stop here to-day. It is not often that there comes a chance of this sort of shooting, and I want to make the most of it. So when the

Khan comes round, fat and cheery, I propose an immediate start for the hills. He wants me to shoot small game, but politely falls in with my ideas, merely remarking that we ought to have started earlier—a fact I have been aware of for the last hour or so. However, we are soon riding over the plain, this time taking the muleteer Kamba, who seems to be able to get the maximum pace out of any beast, despite his riding not less than 15 stone.

‘A futile galloping shot at a sitting crow by the Khan enlivens our eight-mile ride to the hills. To-day we are to go out farther than yesterday, and work part way back on foot over the mountains.

‘Just as we pass the scene of yesterday’s exploits with the moufflon, without a word the Khan gallops, loading his gun the while, to the foot of the slope 100 yards away; dismounts; leads his horse a few yards up a gully; aims; fires, and down the hill rolls a partridge. A sitting “pot,” but the feat of spotting the bird, as he did, while riding by deserves the prey.

‘No Saif to-day, so I have to get along as best I may with my limited Persian.

‘As we trot along I tell the Khan I have just left the Artillery;—the characteristically Persian comment comes at once—“What was your pay?” Another touch of Persia follows when, meeting a *charvadar* walking after his mules, sucking at a *chibook*, or small pipe, our friend—who is to the *charvadar* what a rich squire would be to a labourer at home—stops him, takes a couple of puffs at the *chibook*, and rides on with a “God be thy protection.” (By the way, I have now learnt not to think who has drunk last out of a Persian tea-glass.)

‘We ride into the hills and, after a little, the

Khan, looking ahead, suddenly bursts out: "*Shikar! shikar!*"

'There, on a solitary island-hill in front, very faintly, are to be seen tiny figures.

'A look through my field-glasses discovers them to be ibex, browsing unconcernedly on the edge of a precipice. Our plan is settled in a moment, and I make, on foot, for the mountains to the east, there to creep quietly up to a peak opposite the hill the game are on, while the Khan gallops off round to the back of the same. He will drive them off, ride them, chancing a shot, and endeavour to bring them round to me.

'It is a mile's walk up a valley in between the hills before I reach my peak and ensconce myself where I can get a view of the plain and yet be hidden.

'No signs of the ibex. Ah! there is the Khan coming round the far end of the hill, a toylike little figure. He halts, then suddenly puts his horse to the gallop and heads straight for me. I see no game—can he be only coming to tell me they are gone?

'Nearer, nearer, till I can hear the beat of his horse's hoofs, and then—all at once I see them 1,000 yards away, a scattered bunch of little brown animals galloping over the brown plain and heading well south of me.

'Too late to move now: I simply shift round till I can cover the country to my left rear, and wait.

'There they come, with the beat of the horse's hoofs ever louder, and there they go bounding easily along 300 yards away. Shall I try a desperate shot? I glance them over swiftly—apparently not a decent horn amongst them, and though it is a hundred to one against my hitting, I decide not to waste a cartridge, since, even should I succeed, the prize is hardly worth

it—except for the larder. So I watch the Khan's efforts to "close" with them, till they clamber up the mountain-side, to disappear among the rocks.

'I climb down to meet my host, who tells me that "if I had fired" I should "certainly have hit," more a compliment than a conviction, I fancy. But I think he would have liked me to have tried a shot.

'His son now appears, from nowhere in particular, and we all ride on together a mile to the foot of a steep gully, where we dismount, and the Khan and I strike up the hill. It is a most infernal climb,—generally, loose shale which slips beneath the feet and loses a foot in every two. Perspiring, I dimly think of the problem of the snail who every day climbed up two feet and every night (by some mysterious agency) slipped down one, and mentally conjecture when I shall "get to the top."

'One last effort and we surmount the ridge—and are rewarded, for there beneath us is a view unsurpassable. Like a great sea the plain to the east stretches away in a vast brownness, broken only by a patch of yellow wherein is set a tiny hamlet, and fading into a misty pinkish-blue line of hills topped with snow, behind which lies Yezd. To our rear, across the valley we have come up, rise clean-cut peaks wholly swathed in dazzling white. The sun is over against the hills, and the snow has the peculiar sheen only snow can have, the shadows that deep purple only snow shadows possess. To the right and left runs the brown, barren mountain range we are on, dropping sheer to the arid plains beneath, where, tiny dots, our horses can just be seen.

'We halt—the Khan mainly to breathe, I to drink in the glorious scene. Meanwhile the Khan, borrowing my glasses, scans the peaks around. "No *shikar*,"

he murmurs ; and we turn to the north along the crest, every now and then stopping to rest and scrutinize the precipitous slopes. It is hard going—and uncomfortably insecure—but not dangerous.

‘ We have covered perhaps a mile, and are on the sunny western slope, when, topping a ridge, we both simultaneously see two ibex disappear round a corner in front. One at least has a good head. We leap up, and I take the east slope of the hill, the Khan the west, along which they have gone. The going on my side is the worst we have struck, but I get along somehow, till I see the Khan above me on the crest of the hill. He waves me forward and I persevere, the climbing becoming more and more difficult, and forcing me once or twice to retrace my steps, as I am absolutely “hung up.”

‘ At last a really ticklish bit—to me. Beneath, a drop of perhaps 500 feet, only some little two-inch ledges for foothold,—and these covered with small pieces of stone which make them rather precarious. However, I keep my eyes fixed on the rock, refuse to look down, and scramble somehow to slightly better ground,—to hear a scuffling noise ahead and catch a glimpse of two brown forms disappearing round a corner.

‘ Very out of breath, I steady myself as best I can in my insecure position, and wait to see if I can get a shot at them further on. In a moment one appears far away ;—but there were two, I could swear to it, and, just as I am thinking, sure enough, there above me, perhaps 100 yards away, appears an ibex, scaling the cliff. I have to shoot standing, and without waiting to ascertain much about the beast (let it be confessed, I think after the last hour’s work I would shoot almost anything animate !). So I pantingly let

drive, to see my quarry answer to the shot, but scramble on up. Ejecting the cartridge and ramming home the bolt, I plant another cartridge,—two inches above his head,—and he disappears.

‘I know I have hit him, but he is the deuce of a way above me, in a most inaccessible place, and making back.

‘I make back, too, down below,—getting over, I know not how, ground I had shuddered at, coming,—and am rewarded by seeing my ibex at last, ahead and above me. Yes, indeed, I have wounded him, for he goes trailing behind a track of blood. I kneel down, and, despite my breathless condition, put a bullet behind his shoulder and bring him down the rocks stone dead. The Khan, coming over the crest, exultantly cries, “Praise be to God!” and remarks that the dead beast will “eat” well.

‘A trip forward to search for more game, in vain; an attempt to scramble up the cliffs to the top, which nearly ends in my premature decease; and I return, to find the Khan sitting by my victim.

‘He explains we must get the body to the top and down the other side and, giving me both rifles, starts off with the dead ibex slung over his shoulders.

‘Have you ever tried to scale a precipice carrying a rifle in each hand? It is not a pleasant experience. Several times I have to rely on the butt of a rifle dug into a niche in the rock to save myself from going—for I have “no hands”; and it is with more relief than I can express that I at length reach the top. The descent of the other side is tedious, but not dangerous, and we at length reach the horses in the gully beneath.

‘Thank Heaven I have my water-bottle! By the way, half the india-rubber tube of the “bulb” of my

camera serves capably to suck water out of the bottle while it is still strapped on the horse, and so to obviate the necessity of undoing the straps every time a drink is wanted. I hand the contrivance to the Khan; but after a couple of sucks he decides it is unsatisfactory, and hands it back with a "*Ne mi tawanam*"—"I can't."

'So the straps have to be undone, after all.

'No time for more;—if only we had not had to retrieve the ibex the probabilities were in favour of more sport; but now we must push on "home."

'Through some steep ravines, past an old fort on the top of a most inaccessible-looking crag, and out into the plain to the east. Crossing this at a canter, the Khan suddenly pulls up, and, dismounting, walks up to a small bush. Out jumps a hare; to be missed. "I saw it asleep," explains the Khan, remounting. Yes, saw it asleep under a bush while he was cantering past!—I wish I had such eyes.

'Soon after, another hare getting up, provides a good gallop and an opportunity for ineffectually loosing off some ammunition on the part of the two Persians:—then comes a long ride in, while the night falls and the purple hills fade into the gloom.

'The Khan and his son come to tea, and I give him some cartridges. He wants to know my name, but cannot get nearer it than "*Willimus*":—I manage his all right—"Akbar Khan of Surmek."

'Before dinner—in which yesterday's venison figures prominently—he departs, and so ends (let us hope only for the present) my experience of big-game shooting and my acquaintance with the jolliest old man and the best sportsman I have yet met among the Persians.'

CHAPTER XX

THE EPISODE OF THE 'BĀB,' AND OTHER THINGS

'Things that are mysterious are not necessarily miracles.'—
GOETHE: *Sprüche in Prosa*.

ONLY a little over fifty years ago, a certain man had the opportunity of executing a genuine, well-attested, first-class miracle.

In the middle of the nineteenth century, in a land where the mysteries of the East are forgotten and the wonders of the West not yet learnt, substantial flesh and blood would have been dissipated into space, and afterwards resurrected, live and identical beyond a doubt. After a dramatic and entire disappearance, it would have reappeared when and where it willed, not for an hour or a day, but for the remainder of a natural lifetime. What is more, the whole religious thought of the East might have been profoundly affected by this marvel; for the hero of this possible prodigy was the head of a vigorous and ardent religious body. Persecuted, but undaunted, this sect, already endowed with a creed more advanced and more attractive than its parent, Mahometanism itself, would have received such encouragement and such an apparently divine certificate by their prophet's miraculous feat, that it is exceedingly doubtful whether it would not have conquered, by the agency of this *tour de force*, the religious fields, not only of Persia, but of a far wider area.

All this in the middle of the nineteenth century.

But the miracle just failed of accomplishment. A moment's hesitation, a faulty move, and the thing was done, and what might have been the central episode of a mighty creed became what was practically the finale of a comparatively unimportant sectarian agitation.

The man to whom was granted the unprecedented opportunity for performing so transcendental a miracle as his own disappearance and resurrection was the *Bāb*, and one of the centres of his still remaining disciples is Abadeh, the little village to which I journeyed from Surmek.

The *Bāb* was the title of Mirza ali Mahomet, and it signifies 'the Gate.'

The prophet, who, like all his predecessors, thus claimed to be the portal of a royal road to heaven, had turned from commerce to the cure of souls. 'His religious views,' says Professor Jackson, 'were somewhat eclectic; his doctrine leaned toward a mystic pantheism, with elements of gnosticism, and were of a highly moral order, and so liberal as to include steps toward the emancipation of woman.'

Mahometanism, however, would tolerate nothing of this kind; and when, attracted by a broader and more liberal creed, increasing numbers of Persians flocked to the standard of its preacher, the Mullahs set themselves to work to nip the new heresy in the bud.

Conflicts and persecutions taught the reformers that fire and the sword were still the motto of Mahomet. In the end the *Bāb* himself was captured, taken to Tabriz, and there condemned to be shot in the presence of a great crowd.

He was hung by cords from the wall over a shop in

the city square, a squad of soldiers was marched up in front of him, and the order was given to fire.

Those were not the days of smokeless powder, and for a few moments after the volley the smoke hung thick over the scene of the tragedy. When it cleared away, the *Bāb* was not there.

What if his devotees could have said that he had been rapt up to heaven by the god whose prophet he was? What if they had been able to exult a few days or a few weeks later over the resurrection of their divine master? Surely the preaching,—not only for an hour or for a day, but for the remainder of a lifetime; not only upon scanty occasions and to a few favoured disciples, but continually and to all who cared to hear,—of one who in the most undoubted and authentic way had been shot and resurrected, must have produced a stupendous effect upon the Eastern mind? It so nearly happened.

When the soldiers had fired, by what amounted to little less than a miracle indeed, their shots had actually cut the cords which bound the *Bāb*. He dropped unharmed to the ground, and, under cover of the smoke, took refuge in a little shop. Had he then had the presence of mind to fly by a back way, it would have needed little further aid from fortune to have taken him safe out of his peril and rendered him a power for life and a saint for all time. But when Fate was doing her best for him, he failed to second her exertions. Dazed very possibly by his fall, he remained in the shop until he was discovered and dragged out; and next time the volley was fired it did its work.

So perished the *Bāb*, and so was lost to mankind a miracle which, even in these days of telegraphs and newspapers, would have proved a staggering event,

and if it had happened nearly two thousand years ago would have been an accepted and everlasting evidence of Divine power.

Bābism is to-day a living creed, and it possesses worshippers not only in Persia, but all over the Near East and even in America, that generous almshouse for afflicted creeds.

Abadeh has another title to attention besides its Bābism. In the bazaars there sit, in their little stalls, men who carve from wood curious spoons and boxes, for which the place is famous. But for these two items of interest with which the village is associated, there is little worthy of remark in the lonely patch of houses bleakly situated in this desert many thousand feet above the sea.

Nor is there much to be said about Shulgistan, the next day's resting-place, of which all I remember is an ancient mud fort and the decaying blue dome of an *Imamzadeh*, behind which lay heaped up a white drift of snow.

The third march from Surmek, however, brought me to a place which deserves more notice—Yezdikhast.

'Shiraz,' says an old Persian proverb, 'is famous for wine, Yezdikhast for bread, and Yezd for women.' But there is more than bread to see at Yezdikhast. Truly it is one of the most extraordinary villages of the world. From afar, as the traveller rides over the plain from Shulgistan, there appears a little line of mud houses, set apparently upon the plain a few miles ahead. The illusion continues until he is within a few hundred yards of the village itself. Then he sees the true situation. The mud village level with the ground changes suddenly to a strange dovecot-like collection of houses poised on the top of an immense rock, which stands like a great island in the centre of a narrow

ravine, about the bottom of which meanders a rivulet, and which must once have been the bed of some tremendous torrent. On either side the cliffs rise 100 feet to wall in this little valley, set in which is a nest of wooded gardens and fertile patches sunk far below the level of the desolate plain without.

The whole scene is, indeed, a strangely delightful break in the bleak monotony of the desert. Down a steep path which descends the cliff I made my way into the depths of the valley, and rode across to the hamlet. I was well ahead of my mules, and I spent the time until they came up in exploring the place.

'The extraordinary village,' I find in my diary, as a result of these explorations, 'is only connected with the "mainland" by a small bridge, and upon the island rock are piled up tiers of mud huts, underneath, at the foot, being caverns for sheep. There is one street—a narrow alley, sometimes completely arched over: indeed, more of a tunnel than a road, rather of the style of "the Underground" at home. From this main artery branch off other smaller and, if possible, smellier ones, often to disappear in dark, noisome depths. I go into a mosque, where is a wooden screen carved in places with unintelligible Arabic characters, then out on to a roof-top, whence there greets me a splendid view up and down the valley. There follow the usual crowd of little boys, more than usually interested in my camera; indeed, I have to whirl the case round at the end of its strap to clear a road for my "views."

'Outside again, I descend—still attended by the persistent little boys and a still more persistent man who has constituted himself a totally unnecessary guide, and to whom I shall, I suppose, have to give two *kran*s, —down to the *chapar khaneh* under the high-perched

village. Saif has just arrived, and after a short time I see the first of my mules top the crest opposite.

‘ *Later.*

‘ I have just been out on the mud roof in the twilight. It is a glorious evening ; the frost nips keenly, the sky is a splendid harmony of greenish-blue and pink over the dark hills, with their snow fighting to be seen despite the setting sun’s silhouetting. Over above towers Yezdikhast, like some gigantic blunt-nosed warship bearing down the valley with tier upon tier of portholes, and, far aloft, the multitudinous hatchways and gun bastions.

‘ Darkness falls—the swish of the water from the stream in front keeps up the illusion, and, cleaving the sea with her stem, the ironclad Yezdikhast drives on through the night. . . .’

Experience by this time had taught me one thing : that it was not an atom of good getting out of bed before the men had begun to load the mules. It only meant waiting about in the cold, whereas, if I got up just as they commenced loading, the last of my goods were packed just as I finished breakfast, and just as the last mule was ready to be loaded.

Reflection upon domestic arrangements induced me to put down in my diary at this time a few more maxims of the march.

After again emphasizing the necessity for first obtaining an accurate knowledge of how to do a thing before attempting to oversee others in the business, I continued :

‘ When once you have discovered the best way to do a thing—either from others or by doing it yourself—always insist on having it done that way.

‘ Never be hard upon others beneath you, but when

you have decided what is right and reasonable, never overlook a departure from that standard. You need not be severe, but you can at all events show yourself observant.

‘Worry as little as possible, take things good-humouredly, but be wisely firm. Above all, realize that if those around you think you are fair, reasonable, and just; insistent, not from foolish obstinacy, but from knowledge and experience; then you will obtain their best service and their sincere respect.’

In the morning I rode to Mahsud. All that happened to me was an encounter with a dervish. He was not formidable, and the encounter was an entirely peaceable one. He was the typical holy man of the lower orders in Persia, with a small boy and an infinitely smaller donkey, upon which latter he unconcernedly and inhumanly persisted in plodding upon his way. Of course he wanted money, but he did not seem to mind not getting it, and we all progressed together, chatting as far as my Persian would allow. At length my friend the dervish broke into a weirdly wild noise, which I really cannot call a song. This was too much for me, so I got off to feed the pony and myself. Unfortunately this appeared to possess a peculiar attraction to the good man, who lost quite a quarter of an hour in stolidly watching us, as we respectively ate our oats and our biscuits, while the *charvardar*’s woolly dog, which had refused to leave my side even when I galloped, lay panting in the pony’s shade.

At length came Mahsud, the usual collection of mud walls, and a solitary *chapar khaneh*;—‘to my delight furnished with a table and a chair, on which I write this. The woolly dog seems ill—I am afraid he has over-exerted himself.’

At Kumes Shah, the last stage but one before reaching Isfahan, I happened on a hospitable inspector of telegraphs, who entertained me royally, and gave me news again of the outside world. Somehow, when a man is travelling in desert places without tidings, he expects the rest of the world to stand still,—and gets in time to care not much whether it does or not. If, indeed, when he reaches an outpost of civilization, he finds some momentous event has happened, and he not there to know, his surprise is only equalled by his indifference. These things are not of his world.

There was news indeed when I reached Kumes Shah ; there had been great happenings in the lives of men ; but I remember with what comparative indifference I heard of events which, detailed in the morning paper on a London breakfast-table, would have disturbed the day's round of the most serious-minded of men. It is wonderful, indeed, how man can live his life, quite cut off from communication with the world without, and never feel the loss of it. It tempts one to think sometimes that the 'book of verses underneath the bough' theory of life is, after all, not far wrong, and that the daily paper and the telegraph wire are but serpents in the terrestrial paradise. That is, however, more likely to be a man's view in Persia than in England.

Through winding alleys, down long walls with the beggars sitting in the sun, past the blue domes of the great mosque, out on to the open plain again, I made my way next morning, on the last march before that which was to end my present journeyings on foot and in the saddle.

After a bad night I was very weary, and half-way through the long miles I hitched the pony to a stray stone on a little low hillock, and there lay down in

the broad sunlight in the fresh air to doze away an hour.

Sleep in the open air with the wind and the sun and Nature is the best sleep of all. Better even than the night's sleep under the stars, for it is lighter and more delicious; softer, and less solemn and profound. To drowse off into a soft, hazy unconsciousness, with the faint breeze just brushing gently over eyes it is too tender to awake from under their lids,—to sleep thus is to sink into a warm, delicious, downy nest of restfulness, waking from which is no violent leap from torpor to a dazed consciousness, but a gentle transition from a dreaming to a waking tranquillity. Afterwards there is no heavy-headedness, no screwing up of eyes and stretching of limbs. In an instant the body is ready and the mind alert. It is a refined essence of sleep, the cream of peacefulness.

So I slept by the wayside with the earth for my bed and the breeze for my coverlet, until at last my pony brought me back to the world by gently rubbing his nose on a stone near by. Then we were up and off again, not along the road, but down a streamlet fringed with willows, until the dancing mirage in the distance hardened into mud huts and the grey caravanserai of Shah Abbas, and I rode into Maiar.

There was no *chapar khaneh*, so, meeting Saif, I left him to bring on the mules, and plodded another seven miles to a lonely little place on the plain, where carriages stopped to change horses.

A miserable hostel truly! only a dark mud chamber, where I managed to make a fire while I waited for the caravan. Suddenly there was a rattle and jingle outside, and in came the post carriage—a rude wagon drawn by four horses—to halt for a quarter

of an hour on its way to Shiraz. (You can travel by the post with your letters if you like; but it is better not to, for a man needs more comfort than his correspondence.) And then at last it wandered the mules—poor weary beasts!

A tiny kotal intervenes on the last march to Isfahan, but it is a feeble little thing, and with the goal so near can cause the traveller small trouble.

By *Marg chapar khaneh* I fell in with some Persians, with whom I chatted, and who, as usual, asked me the price of everything I had. They took it, moreover, as almost a personal affront that I was leading my pony instead of riding it. In Persia no one can understand a man walking when he could be riding. Humanitarianism is there an undiscovered virtue, and energy an unknown vice. Moreover, there is something lacking in the Persian sense of the ridiculous, a sense which would in England prevent some equestrian oddities there common enough. To see a corpulent old gentleman of fifty bestriding a puny little donkey whose height is such that the rider has to hold his legs tucked up, in order to keep his feet off the ground, would occasion ribald remarks in this country. In Persia it calls for no comment, except that So-and-so at all events has the self-respect not to go afoot.

Suddenly, just at noon, I topped a crest, and there spread out before me lay Isfahan.

A vista of brown houses and blue domes, flecked with the darker tints of the gardens, stretched away, a welcome sight, over the plains to where, in the distance, rose the great snow mountains.

A little halt by a spring to give my mouth and my eyes alike an opportunity of drinking their fill, and I cantered into the city.

CHAPTER XXI

ISFAHAN

‘From this avenue we had a fair Prospect of the City, filling the one half of an ample Plain, few Buildings, (besides the High Towers of the Mosques and Palace Gates) shewing themselves by reason of the high *Chinors*, or Sicamores shading the choicest of them; yet the Hills begin to keep a more decent distance, and we passed part of a spacious Field before we Saluted the City; into which we entered by Two fair Rows of Elms, on each hand one, planted by the sides of the Chrystal Streams, reaching a long way through a broad Street, whose paved Cawseys Conducted us to the River;

Sic Angustiis a nobis devictis
Ad Augusta ferimur.’

TAVERNIER talks of ‘Ispahan, Sphahan, or Sphoan, as the Persians pronounce it, which some Travellers have too unwarily affirm’d to be a fine City,’ and there may be to-day, as far as the foreigner is concerned, both the same trouble concerning the pronunciation, and no less reluctance to acquiesce in the verdict of those who have indulged in ecstasies over the city.

With regard to the pronunciation, it is never said as it is spelt, ‘Ispahan.’ ‘Isfahan’ is the way it is pronounced, and it is the way in which I shall take the liberty of spelling it, considering it permissible to indulge in phonetics when a little known name is in question.

As to the city itself, it answers very much to old Tavernier’s rather unenthusiastic description. Once

upon a time, indeed, it was the capital of Persia—the royal city ; and even in Tavernier's day he says : ' The Circuit of *Ispahan*, taking the Suburbs all in, is not much less than that of Paris ; but the number of Inhabitants is ten times greater at Paris than at *Ispahan*.'

The proportion has changed now ; but Isfahan remains very much the same, at all events in its nature. Two centuries ago the streets were ' narrow and unequal, and for the most part dark,'—there are the same unsavoury smells and unseemly sights ; the walls are still ' of earth to which do belong some pittiful Towers without Battlements or Platforms, Bastions, or Redouts, or any other Fortification ' ; in fact, it is an Eastern town, and Eastern towns have remained the same for a good deal more than two hundred years.

The two chief glories of Isfahan are the great bridge of Ali-Verdi Khan, over which runs the road entering the city from Shiraz, and the spacious central square, or Meidan, from which lead the chief bazaars. The bridge is, indeed, a splendid structure, with its double tier of arches spanning the broad Zender Rud. It is nearly a quarter of a mile long and has three distinct stories, along which used to run three separate roads, the uppermost of which is now, however, disused.

The lower passage is vaulted and runs through the centre of the lower arches. The middle road is the chief one for traffic, and it is itself a triple affair, having on each side a covered arcade. The uppermost promenade, which runs along the tops of the second tier of arches, is, as has been said, now no longer used.

There are no less than four other bridges which span the Zender Rud, and they all possess a peculiar beauty.

I remember riding out one afternoon round the south of the town, along the river. As we approached one of these bridges, the sun caught the gold-work thereon, and the effect was striking in the extreme, the arches blazing forth in pure gold from a setting of brown, thrown against the blue sky, while in the distance stood out the dazzling white of the snow mountains.

After this gorgeous sight, the way through the bazaars, now dark, save where the naked flames cast a circle of crude light, came as an effective contrast.

The Meidan-i-Shah is, as Lord Curzon says, 'undoubtedly one of the most imposing piazzas in the world.' It is 560 yards long and 170 wide, and, all around, it is enclosed like a huge caravanserai, with long, regular lines of buildings, recessed with a multitude of archways in two tiers. Over the horizon of these rise blue enamelled domes and dark green cypresses. It is a magnificent Eastern picture.

In the old days this great square was the scene of many revelries. Even to-day there still stand the sturdy stone posts set for the old polo matches (at the sight of which the polo-player will shudder when he thinks of a galloping rush for goal).

There, too, in the times of M. Tavernier, there were conducted many other sports. 'In the midst of the piazza,' he tells us, 'stands a kind of May-Pole, or Maft of a Ship, where the People exercise shooting at Birds. When the King comes to shoot, they set a Cup of Gold upon the top of the Maft, which he is to strike down with an Arrow. To which purpose he must ride full speed, nor is he permitted to shoot till he has past the May-Pole, turning himself upon the crupper of his Horse: a remain of the ancient custom of the *Parthians*, that kill'd their Enemies flying.'

‘The Cup belongs to him that strikes it down; and I have seen *Sha-Seft*, Grandfather of the present King, in five Courses strike down three Cups. . . .

‘From the Pole to another *Mosquee*, to the South, just again the Sun-Dial, is the place for all the Poulterers. The rest of the Piazza toward the Palace, is always kept clean, without any Shops, because the King comes often abroad in the Evening to see Lions, Bears, Bulls, Rams, Cocks, and all other sort of Creatures fight, which are brought thither. . . .

‘There are a sort of Tumblers also, that after Dinner set up their Stages in the *Meydan*, and toward the Evening, they that play the Maid-Marians come and encompass a square place with a course piece of Calicut; and then through another very fine Cloth, the Wenches shew a thousand tumbling Tricks and antick Postures. When they have done, they come and ask the Spectators for Money, who give them every one what they think fit.’

Just across the river is Julfa, the city of the Armenians. Lord Curzon, in his account of this place and by the quotations he makes regarding it, contrives to leave, I think, a rather too unfavourable impression of its character and of its inhabitants. Certainly the place is, as he says, ‘cribbed, cabined, and confined.’ But the picture his words leave behind of a series of slums frequented by drunken men and drabs is scarcely a fair one. On the contrary, the streets are infinitely better kept, the smells far fewer, and the shops a deal more civilized than is usually the case in the Persian quarters, while the visible inhabitants are mainly fat and respectable shop-keepers, pallid young men of business, small schoolboys in the universal black ‘field-service cap’ of astrachan, and young ladies, who, as far as can be seen from glimpses of faces peeping from

behind half-closed doors, are frequently not at all ill-favoured.

The Armenian's great sin is his Jew-like business ability, to which may be often added his no less Hebraic avarice and cunning. That is why he is oppressed, and always has been, in almost every quarter of the globe; that is why his church lands are seized by the Russian; that is why he is massacred in thousands by the Turk. No doubt he is sometimes a reprehensible, grasping, extortionate person,—still, he presumably makes his money because his brains are better than those of other persons, and he makes it legitimately. For this crime, however, he often is not allowed to live.

While I was at Isfahan I had an opportunity of an interview with the Governor of the province, the Zil-i-sultan.

Zil-i-sultan is one of the most remarkable men in Persia. His history reads like some romance out of the 'Arabian Nights.' Prevented from succeeding to his natural right of succession as eldest son of Nasrud-din by the plebeian origin of his mother, in his early days he set himself to accumulate by his efforts the power which he could never attain by mere position. Clever, brave, cruel, his rule was respected and feared throughout the South of Persia. His dominion extended over nearly half Persia; the army which he raised was great and efficient; his policy and projects were many and extensive. Educated and intelligent, powerful and strong, it is not too much to say that he was the greatest character in Persia. But, alas! in the East it is not wise for a subject to lift his head too high. In 1888 the downfall came. Province upon province was subtracted from his rule. His army was deprived of regiment after regiment, until all but a mere fraction of its former glory had gone. His power

was fettered, his strength crippled, and he was left a harmless ruler instead of a mighty potentate. He accepted all quietly. He did not use his wits, his strength, and his men to fight against his fall. He did not even plot after his submission. When I went to Isfahan, he was there, acute and intelligent as ever, but in outward circumstances not the man who used to sway the South. I recollect well the day on which I saw him. It was a bright autumn afternoon that I drove through the narrow streets and bazaars of the city to the Bagh, or garden, where the Zil-i-sultan was to receive me.

After a moment's wait at the entrance, I was ushered in. Before me there extended a long narrow gallery, almost like a conservatory, walled entirely with glass down one side. Glass chandeliers hung from the ceiling, and on the walls there were coloured lithographs of various celebrities. At the far end of the gallery sat the Zil-i-sultan, a plump, heavy-looking man, with a resolute yet not unpleasant face. The heavy moustache, a droop in the left eye, and the usual thick Persian lips, may be added to complete his description. The essential feature would be omitted, however, did I not mention the 'life' there was in his face. Nothing of the solid ferocity usually typical to the Eastern potentate; but vivacious expression. His Highness, indeed, looked quite capable of ferocity when he liked, but to me he only showed a countenance lightened by intelligence and good-humour. He made jokes, listened to jokes, roared with laughter, paid compliments, discussed politics. I was particularly struck by the interest he showed in the political situation of the day, an interest singularly foreign to the usual Persian mind, which finds it hard to conceive and tedious to discuss problems outside the scope of

its immediate view. With all his Western thought, the Zil-i-sultan has preserved his Eastern manner. Persia is a land of punctilious politeness. The way a thing is done is frequently more important than the thing itself. If you would succeed in the East, you must be able to do the most unpleasant as well as the most acceptable deeds with an air of conferring a favour, and to the deadliest enemy as to your dearest friend you must outwardly be the same urbane individual. So it occurred that, after politics, the subject became polite personalities. My dress was approved of, my age was asked, and various pegs were manufactured to hang pretty compliments upon, at which business, I fear, I was no match for the courteous Persian. Hunting was the next topic. His Highness has been, and is, a great sportsman, and we discussed Indian shooting. Lastly, we had a word or two about superstition. The Zil-i-sultan was starting for a journey, a thing only to be done in the East on a very auspicious occasion. 'I take no notice myself of these things,' he said, 'but the women and people about me will not let me start till I have a favourable star in front, another on each side, and—one behind the hill there,' with an expressive gesture and a laugh.

It was time to go, and we entered on the preliminary skirmishes necessary to my departure, which eventually occurred without a hitch.

I do not think any human spectacle during my travels impressed me more than the sad sight of this strong, able man, with so great a past and so great a potentiality, sitting there, fretting and brooding as he must, over the things that had been and the things that could never be. Of the details of his life, I, of course, could have no knowledge; all I saw was the man himself, and all I can speak of must come from

the pages of history and the impression received in a brief interview. History and impression alike, however, show a character full of interest and worthy of respect, and a career as great in its possibilities as it had been sad in its results.

During my stay at Isfahan, as at Shiraz, it was my great good-fortune to fall in with a fellow-countryman, who not only provided me with every hospitable comfort, but also generously devoted himself to helping me acquire information and add to my experience of Persian manners and customs.

In his delightful home, the best appointed of its kind I saw in Persia, I met alike English residents with the accumulated knowledge of years, and Persians with the cultivation of a lifetime to set forth their native talents and disposition. The little parties and impromptu chats, in which, under my host's kind auspices, I shared, did much to show me the Persian side of life in a way which is usually denied to a stranger, and I shall always look back with pleasure and gratitude on the days I spent at Isfahan with one whose friendship, I am glad to say, I have since had the opportunity of continuing nearer home.

I recollect a typical little scene of my Isfahan life. To us, lounging in the afternoon of a sunlit day and the luxury of a room furnished with soft Persian carpets and great comfortable chairs, there enter an English resident and a Persian friend. The latter cheerfully greets us with 'Good night' on his entrance, and his conversation, when, as is usually the case, he persists in talking in English, is distinctly amusing. He embarks at once on a discourse on religion, which I wish I could reproduce. I remember he had a most mixed set of commandments, beginning 'I must not stole' and 'I must not take the wife which is my

neighbour's,' and ending 'I must not drink wine when anyone is seeing.' Impelled by this outburst, the conversation moves swiftly. Others drop in, first another Englishman, then, perhaps, a Persian Prince, son of Zil-i-sultan, and we pass such an evening as it gives me an envious pang of regret to look back upon, when I think that now, probably, such times will never come again. So-day followed delightful day, until I had to be pushing on towards Teheran.

From Isfahan, and, indeed, from farther towards Shiraz, the road—for by such a name it now becomes possible, if not appropriate, to call that part of the desert over which traffic passes—becomes fit for carriages. So, in order to economize time, I resolved to leave here my mules and the greater part of my retinue, including Saif—I now knew enough Persian to interpret for myself,—and, as the accommodation in the peculiar kind of 'victoria' in which the traveller journeys is limited, to set off to Teheran with only one of my Indian servants, Stumps, and a few necessary articles of luggage.

After a visit to the capital of Persia I hoped to return, and possibly make my way back to the south by another road, maybe to Ahwaz; but afterwards my plans had to be changed, and, to my regret, I never saw again those I had left behind at Isfahan.

It now became necessary to make arrangements for a *droshki*, the afore-mentioned vehicle in which I was to make my way north. These are not always available, and the traveller will frequently have to wait a few days before he can depart, so it is advisable to arrange well beforehand for the journey. At last I heard that a carriage was to be had, and one evening I reluctantly packed my baggage ready for an early start next morning.

CHAPTER XXII

A TWO HUNDRED AND FIFTY MILE DRIVE

Allons! we must not stop here,
However sweet these laid-up stores, however convenient this
dwelling, we cannot remain here;
However shelter'd this port and however calm these waters, we
must not anchor here;
However welcome the hospitality that surrounds us, we are
permitted to receive it but a little while.'

WALT WHITMAN.

TRAVELLING by carriage in Persia is almost as exciting and interesting an experience as travelling by caravan. To the ordinary incidents of the road, the peculiarly Persian nature both of that road and of those who take charge of the journey add a diversity and uncertainty which, if it sometimes exasperates, never fails to interest.

I do not think I can do better in describing my two hundred and fifty mile drive than make another dip or two into my diary.

'I am up about sunrise,' begins the account on the day of my departure from Isfahan. 'Of course there is no carriage. Still, by the time I have everything packed and ready it rolls up—actually only two and a half hours late.

'But do not imagine that I start immediately. That would not be Persia.

'In fact, the events which follow are so characteristic of the nation that they really must be given in full.

'Last night I was told that 80 tomans (about £16) was the right price for a *droshki* to Teheran. Consequently, I tell the man who brings it that I will only pay him this. He immediately, of course, objects, saying no one ever goes up under 100 tomans, and referring me to the "Ras-i-Bank," whom he knows to be sound asleep and unget-at-able. However, I check-mate him there by telling him it was the Ras-i-Bank himself who told me on no account to give him more than 80.

'He then drops the Ras-i-Bank, and repeats that no one gets to Teheran for less than 100 tomans, upon which I remark that he told me a *kaliska* (or landau) was 120, a *droshki* (or victoria) 100, whereas a friend of mine went up in a *kaliska* for 100, so obviously a *droshki* should be 80. After a moment's thought he invents a long story of how that friend had overpaid them before, and thus got it cheaper, ending up that anyhow a *droshki* has as much accommodation as a *kaliska*, and, in fact, is in every way quite as good, if not a better vehicle. It would be useless to ask him why, then, there is 20 tomans difference in the price, so I merely go to my host, whom I find in bed, and he very kindly comes to the attack. Now the man produces a sort of licence, which says "a carriage to Teheran is 110 tomans." This (an obviously fudged-up thing), he explains, does not mean that either a *kaliska* or a *droshki* is 110 tomans, but that the mean between them is 110 tomans. However, by this time about an hour has gone, and we at length agree to a satisfactory compromise.

'Then we repair to my room to complete the transaction. But even now we are not in smooth water. My compromise has contemplated the possibility of my returning to Isfahan, and he wants the whole return

fare down. Of course I refuse, and offer 90 tomans. He objects, and negotiations again look like being broken off, but at last he consents, 90 tomans are handed over, and I step outside. There comes yet another hitch. He says my luggage is over the regulation weight. I say I have chartered the carriage, and can carry in reason what I please in it. He insists I can only carry 10 maunds.

‘I am getting annoyed, and absolutely refuse to pay another *shahi*, asking Saifullashah in Persian when the “post” goes, and if I can go by that. This has the desired effect; the man says I can pay anywhere I like if I will only have it weighed here; and my host’s servant at this moment telling me there is some breakfast ready, I give in, and, leaving them to weigh it, go off. My host joins me (in pyjamas), and just as we are finishing, we are told all is ready. So at last I go off—hardly able to get into my carriage for the crowd of beggars—and, with a last farewell to my host and Saif, whom I here leave behind, bowl off down the Chahar Bagh, accompanied in my “victoria” by Kishna and Mr. Stumps.

‘It might be thought that I now was really on my way to Teheran. That would be a mistake, for the presumption would omit to reckon with the fact that the driver, being a Persian, did not know his way.

‘With a confidence of which I, with two and a half months’ experience of this land, should be ashamed, I trust to him; and the consequence is, that we gaily drive at least three miles before, from a casual question, our coachman discovers he is nowhere near on the right road—in fact, that we are at right angles to it. Of course this means going all the way back, and it is about eleven o’clock before at last we see Isfahan dwindling behind us.’

After this, I remember, scenery and incidents were, alike, commonplace, and the miles dragged rather wearily. The mud post-houses of Gez at twelve miles, and Amirabad at about twenty-four, were both mere centres of uninteresting wastes.

Not wishing to travel all night, I decided to occupy the rather squalid *chapar khaneh* at Murchakar, after a journey of something like forty miles, and my notes respecting the start from this miserable little place the next morning give some idea of the material circumstances of travelling by carriage in Persia.

‘Despite rising myself and rousing everybody else at an early hour, the sun is well up when we leave the village—with three horses. My vehicle by rights, and when fortune favours, is drawn by four horses abreast; but frequently three, and sometimes only two, are forthcoming. The driver (by which complimentary title one is forced to recognize the man who, in Persia, attempts to control the horses) usually exercises his very limited powers from the box.

‘To-day’s coachman seems more incapable, even, than usual, and while still in the town runs the carriage violently into a fort wall.

‘I may mention that if anything goes wrong, such as a plunge into a ditch or wall; if a wrong turning is taken; or if the horses happen to have decided to head the wrong way; it is the procedure for every one to alight, when the carriage is placed bodily in the required position and the coachman again remounts. If possible, he does this without disturbing the horses, as, should he do so, they immediately turn the wrong way, and a repetition of the performance becomes necessary. In fact, no manœuvre of the least intricacy is conducted from the box, the approved method in such cases being to move either the carriage

or the horses themselves by physical force. In default of a brake, and with a commendable regard for the small control of the driver over his steeds, when descending a hill, a man, preferably armed with a whip, is deputed to walk in front of the animals to scare them back from going too fast.

“‘A hill’ may vary from a slope of 1 in 100 to a precipice with a sharp turn in it: the former is usually descended at a walk, the latter at a gallop.

‘In this case, since we are embedded in the fort wall, the carriage has to be put on the road again, the horses being dragged with it, and, having apparently even less confidence in his powers than I have, our driver unhooks one of the three, and gets Kishna to lead it until he arrives at a point where the nearest thing to run into is ten miles away, and it is immaterial whether the road be kept to or not, as it leads over a vast, smooth prairie. There our third gee-gee is triumphantly hooked in, and we proceed on our tortuous course rejoicing.

‘For about four *farsakhs* we run steadily up the plain, which shelves like some great beach to the foot of the mountains, just before which we come to Nismabad, where we exchange our driver for one even worse, for at the very caravanserai door he involves us in a large ditch, from which we are only extricated by simultaneously pushing the pole and beating the horses’ noses. However, we get along pretty fast after this, as the horses, being fresh, bolt every five minutes or so. Since the road is, as I have said, merely a polite fiction, any other part of the prairie being equally good, this is decidedly an improvement.

‘Soon we wind up into the hills, and after three *farsakhs* and the summit of our journey, reach Targ. Here a cup of tea, some biscuits and sardines, and

another change of horses. This time only two are forthcoming, and the road is very bad. As a matter of fact, we have only had two horses for some time, as, when we began the descent into Targ, our third animal was "cut loose," and contentedly proceeded in front of us, now and again getting driven into from behind, at which he would show his resentment by lashing out furiously.

'Still among mountains—likely spots for big game, they look, though without my glasses I can "spot" none—till three *farsakhs* bring us to Abiazan, a lonely post-house near a white dome.

'Here the interesting bit of news is imparted that there are no horses:—some can be got in a few hours—will we wait? No, I say, certainly not; feed the ones we have, and we can take them on to the next stage. So we wait perhaps three-quarters of an hour.

'When we go on, there is an extra man on the box, the purpose of whom is soon discovered:—when we go downhill it is he who has to frighten the horses back in the way I have described. Plenty of hills there are, too. We are in the midst of the most wild scenery. Desolate mountains rise all around in great ridges; those on our left show us their north-eastern slopes, clad in snow; those to the right are merely bleak, scarred precipices. Ahead, a giant saw-edge of rock cuts sheer into the air, seeming an impassable barrier, till the road takes a sudden turn and plunges into an unforeseen *canyon*. It is a picture of barren grandeur, and the effect is heightened by the dim, uncertain light:—the sun has sunk behind the hills, the sky is overcast with clouds, some tinged with a wild red from the hidden sunset, others, to the east, grim, black, and forbidding. Over all is an ominous silent murkiness. I am not sorry when we pass seven

ghostly willows—their lightning-blasted trunks rising through the dusk like the pillars of some ruined temple—and come, just as darkness closes in, down into Khafr, after three as desolate *farsakhs* as can be imagined. The road on further, I hear, is bad—it has been atrocious lately—so here we stay the night.’

The next morning dawned golden over the hills of snow, and when I walked out into the crisp sunlit air, there lay before me a splendid view, stretching from the barrier line of peaks to the south over the valley, which rose like a great shore to another mountain range far away to the north.

The people of Khafr were very hospitable;—would but the Persians see that such pleasantness is worth far more than their money-grubbing, parsimonious avarice,—for I remember that I presented the man who had, unasked, brought all I wanted and rendered no extortionate account with double what I used to pay the insolent swindlers who thought that a *sahib* was only created to give them money and get as little as they could contrive in return.

Off we went down the hill, but after 200 yards came a stop, as the carriage had stuck in a mud-hole. We all got out, and by dint of Kishna ‘manning the wheels,’ the driver pulling the horses by sheer brute force, and my flogging them and avoiding kicks from behind, we managed at last to extricate the contrivance, and rolled off again to the post-house of Dehabad, sixteen miles below in the valley.

While we halted there I had a talk with a very agreeable Persian, who asked the time—presumably to obtain an opportunity of displaying a watch of which he was evidently very proud. Holding it to his ear to be sure it was going, he smoothed it gently over, and offered it to me, asking my opinion. The hands

pointed to 4.30, the right time being 10 a.m. I remember being irresistibly reminded of the mad tea-party in 'Alice in Wonderland,' and when I opened the back quite expected to find 'the best butter' inside.

Passing the post-house of Mohamedye and Gaz, Kashan came in sight over an undulation in the sand, and we were soon threading the narrow lanes of this, one of the largest business places of Persia. The most interesting thing, however, that I could find with regard to Kashan was the tradition narrated of it by Chardin: 'The city of Cafhan,' he says, 'stands in a good Air, but violently hot, inasmuch that it is ready to stifle yee in the Summer. Which extreme Heat is occasion'd by its Situation; as lying near a high Mountain oppos'd to the South. The Reverberation of which so furiously heats the place in the Dog-Days, that it scalds again. Besides there is one greater Inconvenience more troublesome and more dangerous, which is the great number of Scorpions that infest those parts at all times, especially when the Sun is in *Scorpio*: Travellers are terribly threatened by 'em: And yet for my part, (thanks be to God) I never saw any in all the time that I pass'd through the Country. Neither could I hear of any great Mischief that they had done. It is said, that Abas the Great's Astrologers in the Year 1623 invented a *Talisman* to deliver the City from those Vermin; since which time there has not appear'd so many as before. But there is no Credit to be given to these idle stories; no more then to that same other, that if Travellers stopping at Cafhan are but careful at their entrance into their Inns, to speak these words, *Scorpions, I am a Stranger, meddle not with me, no Scorpion will come near 'em.*'

Personally, I did not give the scorpions a chance of

proving or disproving their courtesy ; but, as the sun was sinking, pushed on past Nasrabad, and eventually drove up to our night's rest-house at Sin-Sin through a world bathed in floods of magnificent moonlight.

Next morning I saw for the first time the great mountain of Demavend rising with its 19,000 feet of height, a majestic giant among the peaks of the Elburz range. From here it looks like a great cone of white sugar, singularly resembling Japan's Fuji Yama.

The road here possesses little interest for any travellers save sportsmen, who would probably find in the mountains round Pasangun a certain amount of big game ;—at Sin-Sin my driver dragged forth from a corner two weird beasts, stuffed grotesquely, which he had shot ; a kind of panther, I should say.

And now on the far brown horizon there glittered in the midday sunlight a golden dot, seeming like some solitary star set there in the plain to guide the weary traveller. Guide him, indeed, it does, according to the Mahometan religion, not only to home, but to heaven. For the golden dot is the dome of the great and most sacred mosque of Kum.

Kum is one of those cities to which, renowned for their sanctity, pilgrims flock on their earthly journey towards Paradise. Here is the burial-place of Fatima, sister of the great and holy Imam Reza, eighth of the eleven prophets. Here, too, are buried countless saints and Kings and Princes ; the place is the Westminster Abbey of Persia. Sanctity and insubordination, however, have a close connexion in a land where the priests are powerful and the people superstitious, and Kum is one of the spots most dreaded by the constitutional Sovereign of the kingdom ; for from such a holy place may some day spring a fire of revolution that shall sweep the land.

The golden dot grew greater and more glittering, and at last, knocking down various commodities and persons, we drove through the picturesque bazaars and streets of the city of saints.

But for its mosque, however, with the beautiful dome and little minarets, there is little to distinguish this most holy place from others of less repute, and, without staying for more than a quick glance at the shrines, I pushed on over the great bridge which spans the Rud-i-Anarbar way again into the desert.

By Manziliye darkness set in ; but it was necessary to do twenty miles more before bed. Calling a halt, therefore, for rest and refreshment, I entered the little coffee-house for a cup of tea, and exercised my Persian in a political discussion regarding Russian influence. Great as is the power of Russia in this part of Persia, and well as it is deserved (since they have done anything that has been done to introduce civilization), the Russians are, nevertheless, apparently not over-beloved by the people. Nor need this be a mark of anything save some spirit of nationality on the part of a Persian, who wishes his own people to rule his own country without interference from neighbouring Powers.

Such a sentiment, whether it be directed against the Russians, the Turks, or the English, is perfectly natural and entirely praiseworthy. Therein, I believe, lies the solution of one of the great problems of the Near East, and no better fate, both for Persia and for the rest of the world, could be desired than that, on the basis of such inspiration, there should rise a prosperous country and an independent people.

The chief thing, I remember, which made an impression upon my Persian friend in the coffee-house was the information I gave him respecting the pay of an English soldier. At this, indeed, he was thoroughly

amazed, and not unnaturally, since, apparently, his soldier friends got practically no pay and one suit of clothes a year. Wages are, after all, only comparative, and the much-abused shilling a day of the English 'Tommy' would be wealth to his Persian comrade. But then, Persia is not England.

Now the horses were ready, the driver refreshed, and with a hearty farewell from my new-found friend, I had to set off again.

The closing scene of the long day's stage shall be told in the words I wrote at the time.

'Away through the night we jolt and rattle, with the glorious moon and the tiny twinkling stars above; away on the last twenty miles of our drive, till my head nods and I doze off despite the jerks and lumberings of the carriage. Blank oblivion;—then a sudden awakening to the rumble and bump and rattle;—still the pale light, and the white interminable road; Kishna asleep on my left; the driver asleep on the box; even, I think, at least two of the horses are asleep! I wake the driver; but he is soon asleep again, and so we roll on through the night till at last "home"—and we draw up by the post-house of Khushk.

'I look out; and away, far down below in a valley, shows a wide expanse as of an inland sea stretching away in the misty night, while close by rise the mountains, from which bubbles a stream, rippling by at my feet. Seen by the crisp moonlight, it is a strange, weirdly Persian scene.'

On the last seventy miles of my journey to Teheran I found no adventures and little interest.

Qaleh yi Mahomet Ali Khan, which is only about the size of its name, was the scene of the longest process of 'hooking in' that I had yet been favoured with,



AN EARLY MORNING START BY CARRIAGE ON THE ROAD TO TEHERAN.

and our driver was both insolent and lazy; but at Hoseinabad a handsome ruffian in a great *shako* actually condescended to hasten himself (I found he came from Tifis; I thought he could not be a real Persian), and after a long, tedious ascent there opened out before us a great plain with Teheran dimly seen, far under the snow mountains. Now there was only one more stage, from Kahrizak to the present goal of my journeyings, a mere twenty miles. But in spite of the obliging willingness of my last driver, we seemed almost destined to have, as the Persian would put it, 'the cup of realization snatched from the lips of anticipation,' for directly we set off at a speed which was encouraged by my offer of a small reward if we did the distance in an hour and a half, we drove straight into a wall twenty yards from the post-house. Our willing but incompetent coachman then, despairing, said that he could not manage the horses; but at last I persuaded him to make another effort, first driving them a few yards myself to show it really could be done (I found, by the way, that they were perfectly easy to drive if only the right rein were pulled). On a collision with a bridge, however, he refused to go further, said the horses were unmanageable, and turned back for others. After a delay these were procured—three of them—and when we started again, madly careered off straight in the direction whence we had come, our driver's efforts to even stop them being of no avail for some time. However, once turned in the right direction, they proved excellent animals, and in one and a half hours we were driving through the semi-civilized streets of Teheran.

CHAPTER XXIII

EAST AND WEST

‘O, East is East and West is West, and never the twain shall meet.’

RUDYARD KIPLING :
The Ballad of East and West.

THE only place I ever found to make any attempt to belie the dictum of the poet regarding the impossibility of the assimilation of East and West was Moscow. There, indeed, there appeared a curious blend of Orient and Occident which made me gravely doubt his statement. But certainly in Teheran it holds good. The city is a combination of East and West, but it is not a blend. The two lie parallel, mixing as little as, at their confluence, do the waters of the White and the Blue Nile. There are the tram-lines of the West ; but there are the bazaars of the East. There are incongruous modern signs projecting from tiny mud houses. There are European roads fringed with Asiatic houses and tailing off into a purely Oriental confusion of ruts and rubbish heaps. There are glittering gates with fancy mosaic work of tawdry patterns on a brown mud ground, and, just round the corner, are the refuse-pits and smells and horrors which are the most prominent feature of any town ‘somewhere east of Suez.’

White men who know the drawing-rooms of London

or the *salons* of Paris brush shoulders with the brown mob that throngs the alleys and bazaars. Trim stone houses stand in the midst of purely Persian gardens. It is all a medley, but it is not a mixture. East is still East, and West is still West.

About it all there is a ridiculous impression of some cannibal King who has adorned himself with a top-hat and tail-coat of civilization, but has forgotten or is ignorant of any further vestments. On the whole, it is not a success.

There is no doubt, however, that in Teheran East predominates. The general appearance is Eastern, with the blue domes, brown walls, and sparse trees of most other Persian towns.

There can be no need to describe the city ; it has been described more often and more fully than perhaps any other Persian place. But when I was at Teheran, the kindness of my hospitable host, who contrived to make my stay in the city as instructive as it was delightful, afforded me an opportunity of seeing several ceremonies and incidents which to me were of no small interest.

The first of these was the Sacrifice of the Camel. This ceremony commemorates the sacrifice on Mount Moriah, and, owing to its religious importance, the priest-executioner used in the old days to be no less a person than the King. 'The *Daroeqa*,' says Le Bruyn, 'or Bailif of the city and sometimes the King himself, gives him the first blow with a great lance, after which they dispatch him with sabres and knives. After this they cut him up into pieces, and divide him among the officers of the several districts of the city ; and as every one is eager to have his share, disorders arise, and sometimes many remain dead on the spot, as it happened that day ; for every one goes armed

either with fabres or clubs, and there is such a throng of horsemen it is impossible to move.'

It was this event which it was given me to see during my visit to Teheran. The streets were thronged; it was a public holiday, and I had had difficulty in pushing through the masses of people on the spirited horse I was riding. Crowds are much the same all the world over; but a Persian crowd has certain peculiarities of its own. The dress of the women combines with the Oriental apathy of the men to make individual movement very difficult.

Arriving at my destination, a house at one side of the square wherein the sacrifice was to be performed, a *farrash* conducted me upstairs into a small room which gave upon the open space in front. This was thick with people, some of whom had clambered, and were still clambering, into the trees which fringed the *meidan*. Beyond, swarmed a drab mass of Persian humanity, and between the two crowds lay the path of the procession.

First came some Persian soldiers ('marched' would be an inappropriate word to describe their method of progression), to the beat of a solitary drum. Then there appeared some mounted men and a most extraordinary brass band, making noises which probably in Persia might be mistaken for music. Next came various beef-eater-like persons with strange hats surmounted with feathers. After them there lounged along the wretched hero of the day, the camel, decked in gorgeous trappings of red, and blissfully unconscious of the extremely short time he had still to exist. Behind him came his executioner, also clad in red for obvious reasons; and lastly there swarmed a collection of nondescripts on horses, ponies, mules, donkeys, and, failing any other means of loco-

motion, their own¹ feet. I did not see the actual sacrifice, as it took place a couple of hundred yards up the road ; but after a wait of perhaps a quarter of an hour, there came back practically the same procession ; but instead of the camel lounging along, it was carried in small furry fragments on the tops of pikes and in men's hands. It is still thought that anyone who can secure a bit of camel on this day will be lucky for the next year, and so the poor animal is subdivided into extremely small portions.

Now the procession had passed ; the crowd streamed aimlessly away ; the sacrifice was over.

The next event it was my fortune to attend was a royal Salaam in the Palace itself, and the account of this I will take straight from my diary.

‘ About eleven o'clock in the morning we drive off, attended by an escort, to the Palace. On our arrival we are conducted into a garden with trees and stone-girt ponds, whose borders are dotted at intervals with lamps, supported by coloured figures of young ladies in a sort of toreador costume, who, unfortunately, owing, I believe, to a flaw of some kind in the casting, have a universally inebriated appearance.

‘ Contrary to the palaces I have seen elsewhere in Persia, here all is in repair, and there is not when you see the backs of buildings that impression of stage scenery irresistibly conveyed by most things Persian. Indeed, here in Teheran is presented the obverse of the coin,—luxury, extravagance, pomp,—the reverse of which I have already seen in the squalor, poverty, and dirt of the country *en route* from Bushire.

‘ We go upstairs into a magnificent room plastered with mirrors and chandelier-like decorations, paved with luxurious carpets, ornamented with giant vases—

a palatial apartment indeed, whence we look out through huge plate-glass windows on to the fountains and pools of the garden we have just left.

‘Below us soon will take place the display we have come to see, but, alas! the central figure will be hidden from us, for the Shah will merely come out into a covered balcony or terrace, running in the same line as our room. Still, we shall see all but the King himself.

‘While waiting, I inspect a beautifully tiled room used to store those presents collected by the Shah which are not in the great Museum.

‘It is a quaint assemblage of magnificent lumber. Stored in no order,—priceless curiosities thrown down by the side of valueless rubbish, glorious works of art reposing under the shadow of domestic furniture,—it is itself an epitome of Persia and the Persians in its strange incongruity, its pitiful disorder, its combination of departed glory and present decay.

‘In one corner is an untidy pile of velvets and ermines; close by, a collection of very inferior photographs; in the opposite corner a beer-machine, on which reposes an oil-painting.

‘A bookcase filled with volumes fronts a table covered with curiosities of natural history, which in turn looks on to a slab where lie specimens of ancient pottery. Then comes a musical-box. Typewriters lie neglected, magnificent tea-sets and services of glass have never seen a table-cloth, great vases merely contain the dust of years, a map of the British Isles, hung upside down, averts in this way its gaze from a picture, hung below, whose breadth of subject is redeemed by no beauty of execution. Violins mutely appeal for the touch of a hand which shall unseal their hidden harmonies, forlorn mandolins cry for fair fingers and sweet moonlit hours

—the very musical-boxes seem to pray to be taken where the babble of childish laughter shall greet their long-dumb tinkle.

‘In a room beyond, more china, more glass, unused, unwanted.

‘All is chaos, neglect, pathetic waste.

‘I leave with an ache at the heart—all this rich uselessness, and, outside,—the people—poverty—desolation.

‘Next to the museum itself in a huge glittering room are glass cases filled with a collection almost as composite as that I have just left, with at the end the Peacock Throne,—for that is its name, though in reality it is no more that relic rapt from Delhi than is the chair on which I sit to write this. Still, it is very fine, and its jewels and enamel, if they fail to excite a historic interest, at all events appeal to the imagination in other ways.

‘A stuffed bird which warbles in a cage is over against a cabinet in which are artistically hung sixpenny hand-glasses, sometimes with broken handles. Originally, I am told, there were even more extraordinary dispositions of things ; but I did not see Lord Curzon’s tooth-brushes, though it is quite likely they were somewhere about.

‘The chief delight of the attendants was a musical-box with moving figures, which they wound up for our benefit,—I think my favourites were the sixpenny looking-glasses.

‘At length sounds recall us to the first room, where our party has been augmented by the addition of a Cossack officer and a French actress from a company which is—wonder of wonders—touring in Persia.

‘Now here comes the display. It consists almost entirely of soldiers,—I fancy it eases the Shah’s mind

to sometimes see outward and visible proofs of his immense strength. He should pay a visit to the South.

‘The principal feature of each regiment is its band, though the soldiers are, really, mostly clothed alike, and generally have some sort of weapon.

‘But the bands are the most formidable ;—they come in at the two-hundred-yard intervals occupied by a regiment with a furious and awe-inspiring clamour, which they continue, regardless of any other rival band, without cessation (except a temporary one, caused by each rank in turn stumbling over a small step, which has the effect of interrupting and slightly disconcerting their efforts), until they come to rest in a their appropriate parts of the garden.

‘I am not able to ascertain whether the various bands are playing the same tune at different times or different tunes at the same time ; but in either case the result is a combination of discords vastly superior to that caused by the puny efforts of any individual collection of instrumentalists I have yet met in Persia.

‘I have mentioned the little difficulty of the small step. Another appeared to be the trees. It was interesting to watch whether the standard-bearer would entangle the colours in the tree immediately opposite the entrance, and, a little further on, to count how many men had to “fall out” owing to catching their bayonets in a branch. In this latter case sometimes a serious commotion was caused by the unfortunate man’s helmet being dislodged owing to his efforts to extricate himself, and his having to rescue it from among the feet of his fellows.

‘The uniforms of the men apparently do not vary much, except in the case of certain regiments, who at

first sight resemble fire brigades, owing to the peculiar construction of their helmets. On closer and individual inspection this is sometimes modified to a strong likeness to Tweedledum—or was it Tweedledee?—with the coal-scuttle on his head. The fashionable way to wear this head-dress would seem to be to adjust it as far back as possible. This, though it imparts a peculiar rakish appearance to the wearer, could doubtless, as remarked one of the Tweedles, be very useful “to guard against having one’s head cut off” (“one of the most serious things,” I believe were his words, “that can happen to one in a battle”).

‘There are, perhaps, three thousand soldiers, and for about half an hour they stream in and take up their positions in the garden:—I actually detected some marching among one or two of the regiments.

‘Meanwhile various people have passed immediately under our windows.

‘First a perfectly resplendent officer, who is so covered with decorations that he has had to let them encroach on a light blue cordon he wears, despite the fact that the whole upper part of his body is devoted to a parade of stars, Orders, and medals.

‘Then a poet—the most poetic poet I have ever seen. He is long-haired, moderately venerable, clothed in a long brown robe, and wears a peculiar muff-shaped hat. In his hand is the scroll of the poem he is shortly to read to the Shah (which, I may remark here, has to be exclusively devoted to eulogies of His Imperial Majesty).

‘After him comes a collection of officials, plainly dressed, and also wearing peculiar hats, while in the distance is an aged and infirm royalty in a bath-chair.

‘Now here comes the climax of the display—the Cossacks.

‘Preceded by a very different band playing a well-known march, in file the smart, frock-coated men with a swing and dash and striking appearance which form a strong contrast to the scene just witnessed.

‘Here, too, come their officers, just under our window ; file after file of grim, black-coated, lavishly decorated men swinging past in perfect step and absolute silence. Certainly the Cossacks are the feature of the day.

‘The stream has ceased ; all are in their place. Sudden—a fanfare of trumpets ;—His Imperial Majesty has appeared on the balcony to our left.

‘Silence. Then steps forward the poet.

‘In a high, sing-song voice he recites to the King upon the platform the King’s praises ; mellifluous, high-sounding titles, extravagant Arabic epithets ;—then the Name. All bend their heads ;—the King’s Majesty is sacred.

‘Twice, after the flood of speech, comes that Word and that obeisance ; then, with a deep reverence, the poet steps aside, and again the trumpets blare forth their brazen notes. And now back pour the troops, this time under his gaze, and beneath our window.

‘It is over.’

My visit to Teheran took place before, at the beginning of this year, the new Shah came to the throne.

Riding one day to the Zoo just outside Teheran, I met Mozuffer-ed-Din, the reigning monarch. Up the road there appeared a dim cavalcade approaching. First came men with maces, then, behind them, we faintly saw a motor-car. It was the ‘Point of Adoration of the Universe’—the Shah. He stopped to speak to us, so that I obtained an excellent view of His Majesty. He was a handsome, heavy-looking

man with a large 'moustache, almost exactly like his likeness on the postage stamps. In the car with him was a small boy, and after a moment or two's conversation, they were whirled off back into the city.

The Zoo itself was a combination of a Persian garden and an inferior copy of the institution in Regent's Park.

A path lined with gaudy red and blue lamp-posts led down a garden through a gorgeous apartment, and up to a long line of cages, the home of several leopards and a lion. Outside, three large bears and one small one, a monkey, and a woolly sort of goat, were leading, at the time I was there, what was, I should say, a fairly miserable existence.

Visits to Gulahek, the summer quarters of the Legation; Rhey, the ruins of the ancient Rhages; and other places, occupied pleasant afternoons; but, keeping to my intention of not describing what has been already over-described, I will not enter into an account of these places.

Near Rhey is a Parsee tower of silence, and by climbing up the hill it is possible to see down into the interior of the burying-place where the dead bodies are exposed on a grating for the birds and the elements to destroy.

My travels in Persia were now almost at an end. There were only a few hundred miles of land and sea between me and Russia, and, had I wished it, I could have reached Baku in a few days, for there is quite a respectable carriage road to Resht, on the Caspian, whence the way lies by steamer.

This, however, appeared dull to me; so, although it was still early in the year, I determined to make my way by caravan over the passes of the Elburz Mountains, and reach the sea at the little port of

Meshed-i-Ser. Both from inclination and by necessity my return to Isfahan had to be abandoned, and, after a few days of preliminary arrangements, I found myself, my servants, and my little dog, setting out on the road again, amidst all the pomp and ceremony of a caravan.

CHAPTER XXIV

OVER THE HILLS AND FAR AWAY

- ‘ On every hand the roads begin,
And people walk with zeal therein ;
But wheresoe’er the highways tend,
Be sure there’s nothing at the end.
- ‘ Then follow you, wherever hie
The travelling mountains of the sky.
Or let the streams in civil mode
Direct your choice upon a road ;
- ‘ For one and all, or high or low,
Will lead you where you wish to go ;
And one and all go night and day
Over the hills and far away.’

R. L. STEVENSON.

HERE was I on the road again at last (for I do not count my excursion by carriage), and again there came the old curious sensations ;—the new appreciation of space and time ;—the feeling of having slipped back into another age ;—the oppression of an interminable silence, only broken by thoughts ;—and always, as a continual accompaniment, the grey-brown hills and plains,—the strange fascination of unvarying, barren immensity, a dull, monotonous note underlying and permeating all.

Due east we went ; first along the great plain outside Teheran, plodding parallel to the snow-clad range ; then abruptly we dived into the hills. My new *charyardar*, Meshed-i-Astulla, the best little

chap of his kind I met in Persia, had waited behind when the rest of the caravan went on, and was now following and overtaking them with me. We very soon made friends (any friendship that is worth making is worth making quickly), and before we had caught up the mules we were on as familiar terms as imperfect Persian and ignorance of English could be.

Winding among the bare, bleak mountains we ever ascended until, over a crest, there opened out a long panorama of gaunt snow-sprinkled hills. We were in among the first beginnings of the great range of the Elburz, which stretches in a towering rock wall along the southern shores of the Caspian, and which culminates in the lofty white cone of Demavend.

Many a thousand feet of climb were before us, but here the way was in and out and up and down a switchback series of low ranges.

From this first summit, the false climax of the day's march, we descended a steep track by the side of a mountain torrent, in which, half-way down, a dog was gnawing a carcass. (Why does a Persian always throw a dead body into a stream if Nature has provided him with one?) There, at the bottom, was a delightful prospect of little green patches of cultivation and the curious light greenish-grey streaks which show the delicate plantation of a Persian garden.

Most of the places where a moment's halt in this hustle of the world would be delightful have to be left inexorably behind, and with a regretful backward glance at this little green jewel in the rough setting of the hills, we crossed the quite moderate-sized river at the bottom of the valley, and climbed the winding road which mounted beside a tributary to the east.

Night was spent in a filthy lower room, windowless

and almost doorless, at the tiny village of Kamar, and early the next morning my caravan set forth again on its arduous business.

Truth to tell, I was not quite easy about this last expedition. It was early in the year, the passes were scarcely negotiable, and I had left myself a march for every day which remained until the steamer I had to catch should touch at Meshed-i-Ser. It was a race against time and a tussle with Nature and with Fate in her capacity as mistress of the weather.

The first miles of to-day's journey lay in and out of desolate rising hills, with now and then the glimpse of a vista of snow-crowned peaks. As we rose it grew very cold, and an ungenial weather-god came to the assistance of Nature in her attacks on our comfort.

So we wandered on through patches of snow, down steep paths across dirty-white torrents, until at last at a tea-shop we gratefully turned in to rest during a passing snowstorm. Just beyond our little haven of refuge we turned sharp to the north, leaving the main road to Firuzkuh, and taking the track over the mountains direct to Barferūsh. We were now well off the beaten paths of men; the road became a mere mule path, winding upward amid ever-increasing snow, till at last we were tramping through a track of slush a foot wide and quite a foot deep, cut through snow two or three feet thick. At length came the summit of the pass—only another fictitious climax, the real range of the Elburz still lay ahead—and then we steadily descended into a most picturesque valley, where thin light stems of trees, brown mud roofs, and a blue dome, showed where lay the village of Demavend. This was yet another of the places there is no time for in this world, and we pressed on

round a corner down a villainous miniature kotal and then, striking east, entered the hamlet of Ahmedabad.

Here came a pleasant little surprise, for as we approached there rode out to us 'Mirza Ali, son of Karbal-i-Ismal,' the chief of the village, who hospitably insisted on my returning to his little house and occupying for the night his *bala khaneh*, or upper room. My host was a decent-looking young Persian, and I shall always remember with interest and appreciation the night I spent under his roof. This is what I find concerning the matter in my diary :

'The room to which I am conducted is most luxuriously furnished with cheap crockery and lamps, which gives it a flavour of the seaside lodging-house. About the floor are rugs and pillows, the latter arranged in neat little piles round the walls ; a samovar stands in the grate, while sheet-like curtains can be drawn across door and window. All round the top of the room run shelves crowded with the aforesaid cheap crockery ; lower down, ledges on which stand the lamps and candlesticks. An artificial flower in a vase on the mantelpiece recalls more than ever the King's Road, Brighton.

'I take off my boots and enter. Seeing the pillows, a vague fear seizes me—but I am reassured, no one else will occupy the room but me—Stumps even, much as they admire him, may not enter. So I have my things sent up and get them ready for the night. While I am down below I gather that my friend has by no means a bad eye for beauty, for I see various of his wives, who are not at all shy, but stand unveiled gazing at the strange sight. The youngest, a girl of perhaps seventeen, is quite pretty, and none are at all bad-looking—they have not the coarse, heavy lips and

generally unprepossessing lower part of the face so common in Persian women. [See illustration facing page 58.]

‘Upstairs I change my socks and put on bath-room slippers—of course, before every one, it is a *tamasha*—“a sight.”

‘However, my feet are cleaner than might have been expected, considering all things, and do not disgrace me—in fact, they seem to impress the populace, and I am irresistibly reminded of the “beautiful white legs” in “King Solomon’s Mines” when I hear someone whisper: “Like milk, aren’t they?”

‘Then another *tamasha*—I set up my folding-bed and make it.

‘The blankets, etc., amuse them much—I explain, India is hot, Persia cold.

‘The table also proves of enthralling interest, as also do my pistol, glasses, watch, knife, and compass, but the climax is reached when I open my desk to get this diary out.

‘My watch-chain, writing-paper, note-books, ink, all are eagerly examined—the last being eventually upset over the table by a small boy who does not understand it, and attempts to look at the bottom of the bottle. He is immediately hounded out of the room with oaths, but returns on my intercession. The man on my right cannot understand my refraining from an outburst of fury, and quietly mopping the mess up; he says with a touch of irony or awe, I am not sure which: “A good man, truly.”

‘I give sheets of note-paper to various people, who seem most pleased with them, and exclaim over the excellence thereof. Also, I divide a half-loaf of white bread among them. They do not know what white bread is. The ladies, who have by this time quite

taken me into the family, sit in front unveiled, and one dares to take a piece of bread before her turn.

“*Pidar sag*,” cries mine host, “*biro*”: which being interpreted meaneth, “Daughter of a dog—get out;” and the wretched girl flies for her life out of the door.

‘But, of course, that is the natural attitude towards women in Persia—they are inferior beings, have half a soul or none at all, according to taste, and are only created for the enjoyment of man, to be merely mistresses and child-begetters.

‘Among other things in my desk appears a photograph of myself, which Mirza Ali begs of me, so I eventually give it to him, writing, to the best of my powers, my name on it in Persian. This he studies carefully, repeating it like a child learning a lesson, and eventually goes out with the rest, murmuring, “Iliat Kramshahi Willias—*ne kheir*—Iliat Krarshahi Williarms”; having set the photograph in a place of honour underneath the imitation flower on the mantel-piece.

‘Perhaps it is a little troublesome at times to have people bursting in at any minute, but it would offend them to order them out; they mean no harm, and cannot understand anyone’s not wanting to see them; and besides, I like to see as much as I can of the Persian as he is.

‘So I do not complain when, soon after, Mirza Ali comes in and, after a word of salutation, sits down at my elbow as I am writing, and silently gazes at this book and the words as they come on it. Presently another man joins him: “Writes well?” says one. “H’m!” says the other, and again silence reigns supreme. After ten minutes one asks why I am writing;—five minutes after, what I, am writing.

Then all is stillness till the arrival of my dinner interrupts the orgie, and they file out.

‘After dinner I hold quite a reception:—all the wives, Mirza Ali, two other men, and the small boy who spilt the ink. We talk over all sorts of matters;—hearing I am going to Russia, one asks, “Is there war between England and Russia?” I say no, of course not, and describe as well as I can the political situation. At last I feel I must sleep—I am dead tired, have a bad headache, and have to get up at four to-morrow—so I tell them “they are permitted to go”—and this being in Persia a polite command—they go.’

Of all the days I have ever lived, I think none has been more arduous or called for a greater combination of mental and physical strength than the day I left Ahmedabad. Awaking at 3.30, I got up at 4, for the events of the day demanded a very early departure.

To-day we had to make our way across the highest pass between Teheran and the Caspian, and the path lay over deep snow. If the sun were to come out, by the afternoon the road might be impassable, owing to the state of the snow across which we had to travel; so I dragged my clothes on and, half asleep, folded my blankets, collapsed the bed, and packed both in their valise. The table followed, and then the rest of my paraphernalia, after a hasty meal of a plateful of porridge and a couple of eggs.

By this time it was beginning to get light (talking of light, when I went to shut my window last night before going to sleep, looking out, I saw a light in the room below, and there were all the ladies of the family cosily sitting with their legs under a big central rug, beneath which there was burning a little charcoal

stove; a better and cheaper way, they consider, of keeping warm than by blankets).

Snow had fallen heavily during the night, and still drove relentlessly down. The grey dawn only made everything look more wretched, and I must confess I did not feel very cheerful at the prospect which lay before us. The march is ordinarily a bad one, and under the conditions looked like being formidable, if not actually dangerous.

We loaded up in the heavy snow, and set off on foot about half-past six. It was bitterly cold; the ground was at first a mere bed of slush covered with the recent fall, and so featureless had everything become that, after going a little way, my *charvardar* said he would not go on without a guide. I was thinking that to get lost was a likely and most unpleasant event, so I assented, and we eventually procured no less than three. The road was quite undistinguishable from the rest of the country, as, owing to the blinding snow storms, was the rest of the country from the sky, so that the first mile or so, an arduous ascent of a steep slope, was both tiring and uninteresting. No riding to-day; for the road was so evil that every effort had to be made to relieve the mules of every pound of baggage possible, and the loads had been distributed over every available animal.

After an hour or two, the snow suddenly stopped, the clouds lifted, and disclosed behind us a glorious white-sheeted panorama stretching away to dim snow-clad peaks, lifting into the blue sky summits wreathed with clouds. The toilsome ascent, the hideous, perpetual rise and fall of the hoofs of the horses on the narrow track immediately in front, all were forgotten, and there came a sense of magnificent elation. We were on the roof of the world, and it seemed as though

all lands, all seas, all things, might lie stretched out before us. But soon down came the snow again ; the landscape once more became a great white uncertainty, merging—where it was impossible to tell—into a great white infinity in which the only real things were the myriad hurrying flakes,—the footprints of the mules,—now and again a black dot of rock ;—and oh ! so bitterly cold. Up and on,—on and up, with never a sight of any goal, never a glimpse of any summit. At last definite outlines started out of the dimness—the tiny hut which marked the top, and now we began to descend.

In all the long tedious ascent of this Pulur Pass, save for a fleeting vision of the roof-tops of the world, there was only one circumstance which broke the horrid monotony. It would be a farce to call it music, for it was Persian. But it was a grateful noise. One of our acquired guides was evidently a singer, and, in spite of his breathless condition, the attractions of his Muse were too strong for him, and he gasped out to the utmost extent of his depleted lungs a wild native refrain, which, I believe, did much to enable us to reach the top at all. It was not beautiful, but it was vigorous, and it cut like a ray of sunlight into the tempestuous gloom around. At the top of a peculiarly rasping voice he panted out a never-ending refrain, the sentiment of which was, despite the incongruous rendering, undoubtedly an amorous one.

Now and again the first phrase of his song would continue indefinitely, like a gramophone out of order, and sometimes, at a particularly steep ascent, the performance would be overwhelmed by a gasp. Our artist, indeed, was quite a character ; a cheery fellow, who did much to keep up the spirits of our caravan. Despite the weather, he preserved his spirits, chaffed

every one, pulled and pushed mules about, and, generally, was the life of the party. Such a companion is something to be profoundly grateful for on our journeyings in gloomy places, whether it be in the Elburz Mountains or along the road of life.

At this point my diary shall take up the account :

‘Still we descend ; nothing further than 6 yards away can be seen in any direction. The“ blinding, hurrying flakes beat against my face, get into my ears, down my collar ;—my nose becomes a thing that has to be felt for, to be sure it is there, until my fingers grow too numb to feel it ;—feet are mere instruments of progression, and only appreciable by the sense of sight. So we plough on in the blizzard, along the narrow trodden path through the banks of snow, until there comes a shout from in front—and we halt.

‘White-clad figures emerge from the obscurity ;—we have met another caravan. Nothing very dreadful it sounds ;—but wait. Our little path is not solid ground, on the contrary, it is merely a hard crust over unknown depths of snow, and it is only a couple of feet wide. To pass, one of us must leave it, and make a detour in the treacherous tracks to the side. So there is a deal of probing in the snow with sticks, much furious altercation in strident tones (every one in Persia always talks at the same time as somebody else, if possible, and endeavours to shout him down ;—if there are more than two engaged, all the better).

‘Eventually it is they who have to go round. Two mules at once “go through,” and remain helplessly floundering in the snow. This, of course, produces a very babel of epithets, arguments, curses, and so on, and as it appears to be going to be some time before we move on, I get out a few biscuits and a piece of

chocolate, turn my back to the blizzard, and make an effort at "lunch." It is a piteous affair—with the driving snow turning the biscuits to pulp, my fingers scarcely able to hold the handkerchief it is all tied up in, the drips from the blankets over the mule-loads and from my hat turning to icicles; everything desolate, wretched—and the thought of another fifteen miles of it all.

' When I see poor little Mr. Stumps curled up in a bank of snow trying to sleep, it is the climax. I put on my gloves (such big holes in the fingers) and turn to give a hand with the mules. At last we set off—more bitterly cold than ever; only, after a mile or so, to meet another caravan. This time it is we who have to move out of the way, and all our mules but one are soon wallowing and rolling in the snow. They are pulled out, and we start on again—but only to meet yet another lot of mules: I should say we passed three hundred in a day, all carrying Russian goods from Meshedi Ser—mainly sugar, I believe. Gracious Providence at last sends a gleam of sunlight, and in it we pass through steep gorges, beneath huge smooth snow-fields, whence now and again roll miniature avalanches, until of a sudden, on looking up, there right above the belt of clouds looms a cone-shaped mass of white with a smoke-like cloud issuing from it,—Demavend. At first it almost startles—there far above where any earth should be, an island in cloud-country. Then slowly the veil rolls away, and its bare white flanks stand out one by one—great slopes of lava streaked with snow—till the whole gigantic half-symmetrical mass is discovered. Despite its being rather too sugar-loaf in aspect, its huge, overwhelming stature has a vast, solemn impressiveness. We, down here, ourselves at no small altitude,

yet seem to have merely crawled 'up an inch or two after all.

Down still further, and we come to a lonely tea-house—a not unwelcome sight—and, looking back to the grim chasm we have just emerged from, I sip a glass of tea with a devout thankfulness that, *Insh'-allah*, I shall never repeat to-day's experiences.

But they are by no means over yet. Half an hour's rest, and, just at midday, on we go—we have about ten miles still left.

At the bottom of the hill comes a bridge over a little stream ; then another descent into a magnificent gorge whence rushes a torrent from between two great walls of rock. We cross by a stone bridge—like all such, of one arch—and start on a long ascent, with everywhere around us a prospect of giant snow-flecked peaks rising out of the undulating white plains, all bathed in dazzling sunlight. But alas ! this does not last.

Just over the top, as we are crossing a long, desolate plateau of snow, the sun suddenly disappears, and I have only time for a glimpse of a Himalaya-like vision of range on range of mountains, intersected by fathomless valleys, before, with a shriek and a roar, down on us comes another blizzard.

I wrap a scarf over my ears, and we struggle on over the bleak desolation through the fierce driving snow until we reach a place where the path cuts obliquely down the face of a precipice with, to the left, a wall of rock rising sheer from the inner side of the path, to the right, an awful chasm descending a thousand feet, to be lost in a gloom whence sounds the roar of a torrent, and from which blow furious gusts of wind whirling the snow-flakes up relentlessly before them into our faces as we battle along. Mile.

upon mile, till at last the wind dies, the clouds lift, and, just before we reach Reneh, our halting-place, the sun comes out and illumines a magnificent scene.

‘We are on the side of a mighty mountain, which towers over us. Behind, rise giant crests glistening with snow, while opposite, others descend sheer to where, far below, foams the river whose roar we have heard for long. There beneath, by the stream, row upon row of mud roofs and a curious tent-like mosque show the village of Ask, while straight ahead on a plateau lies Reneh—our destination. There we arrive about 4.30—ten hours’ hard walking, and I think twenty-six of the most infernal miles I have ever come across—or, please Heaven, ever will.

‘I soon set to and make my bed in a little mud hut (really not quite so dirty as usual), and, taking off my wet boots and socks, sit down by the light of a candle, and, I am afraid rather too tired for the result to be very much good, to write this diary, until, about eight, just as my eyes are giving out, in comes my dinner—some rather tasteless soup, half a tin of fried “bully-beef” (one of my most important discoveries), and some boiled rice, also two stewed apples.

‘To bed at nine—dead-beat.’

CHAPTER XXV

THE LAST OF THE ROAD

'I think heroic deeds were all conceiv'd in the open air, and all
free poems also ;
I think I could stop here myself and do miracles ;
I think whatever I shall meet on the road I shall like,
And whoever beholds me shall like me ;
I think whoever I see must be happy.
* * * * *
I inhale great draughts of space ;
The east and the west are mine, and the north and the south
are mine.'

WALT WHITMAN.

THE open road was leading me to a new land, to another Persia, to a different world from the one I was leaving. Already the transformation scene was taking place. The air was changing. Trees—live green trees, like those of a Western land, began to dot the slopes of the mountains. The haunting barrenness of the great solitudes of the Persian plateau was gradually disappearing, and with the new earth and the new air there came new life and new vigour of soul. Instead of the arid exaltation of the high deserts, there came green expanding freshness, a joyous glow at heart; no lofty serenity, but a pulsing, leaping fervour, the feeling that in England comes with the spring. 'It was another phase, another aspect of this great and wonderful world, which, wherever we turn, offers us some new marvel. The mood of the East

was merging into the mood of the West, and both were glorious and good. No less, but perhaps even more, was the open road a continually unfolding joy and everlasting inspiration than it had been in all the long marches through sandy wastes, over rugged mountains, by ancient ruins, and through strange cities.

It was with a sense of regret at a surely approaching parting from an old friend that I set out every day on these last marches of my travels.

Next morning we were up at four, for there were seven long *farsakhs* in to-day's journey. The *farsakh* is a measure peculiarly suited to the Persian character. One man can say one and another two, and both may be right—or wrong. Generally, indeed, it is something approaching four miles; but up here the *farsakh* is always more than a southern *farsakh*, and seems to approach five miles. Things are, indeed, here altogether on a bigger scale, and those who rave about the difficulties of the Kotals in the south should try the Pulur Pass; I will warrant they will afterwards think the Kotals a carriage-road.

It was *sir-i-af-tab*—the first ray of sunlight—when we eventually got off; at least the snow summits of the hills opposite were bathed in a blaze of radiance; but down here we were still in a chill shadow. Truly it was a glorious sight. To the south the array of giant white crests, all dazzling in the morning sun, showed of what a scene of splendour yesterday's snow-storms had deprived us, while down from them ran this great ravine with, far below, its white and green waters dashing between steep hill-walls. It was all reminiscent of such scenery as is to be found on the lower slopes of the Himalayas, at Naini Tal or beyond Simla at Mahasu or Mashobra.

The air, too,—crisp, frosty, glorious; the seven *fursakhs* did not seem appalling. Down and ever down we went until, turning a corner, there suddenly burst on my sight a curious and wonderful scene. From farther up the mountains I had seen some strange black dots, spotting the face of a cliff which ran at right angles across our path. Now at close quarters I saw the explanation of what had puzzled me at a distance. They were a mighty collection of rock dwellings. I stood gazing at them in amazement; then I counted; there were fifty and more various chambers in the rock wall. I felt that I could not pass this place without making a more detailed examination of these strange relics of a primitive race, and so, telling the *charvardar* to go slowly on with the mules, I proceeded to explore and make notes, from which I afterwards put together a short account for the *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*.

For a space of about 50 yards the cliff was honey-combed with the entrances to these dwellings. All but the lowest were practically impossible of access, and far above me there temptingly yawned black openings which led obviously to little suites of rooms. I found, however, that by scrambling I could just reach a couple of the lowest apartments. It was a difficult business; but I was well rewarded for sundry bruises and for almost slipping just as I gained the threshold by finding a small set of rooms almost untouched. Passing through a passage, I came to a sort of shaft about 15 feet in height and 4 feet square leading up inside the cliff to still other chambers, in one of which was an ancient rubbish-heap.

I much regretted that I had to make so cursory an examination of these rock dwellings, and I certainly think that they would repay closer inspection. The

upper and, at present, inaccessible suites of rooms might be reached by a ladder or rope, and there might there be valuable finds. From the natives of the district I could find out nothing except that the dwellings were 'very old'—in this case, '*Vakht-i-Jamshyd*'—which means to say that the Persian has no idea at all of their date, and puts them in a legendary period.

The mules by now were far ahead. I hurried after them, and when I eventually overtook them, the old *charvardar* shook his head at me as if I were an errant child whom he could not have the heart to scold, and then smiled when I told him it was *khub tamasha*—a fine sight.

Where it could, the road followed the river, but since engineering is an art practically unpractised in Persia, whenever there was an obstacle in the path, it dashed wildly up the hill and down again, to get round it, by which we gained picturesqueness at the expense of rapid progress.

Strikingly picturesque the scene certainly was. On the opposite side, a little further down the gorge, was a tiny hamlet, nestling under the shade of what at first appeared to be a huge detached mass of rock, with, behind, the mountains towering up to their snowy summits. But on a second look, there, on the isolated peak, appeared ramparts, towers, battlements; while under the cliffs extended massive outworks and walls. It was a gigantic fortress, separated from the main rock by a narrow chasm, down which poured a stream in a thin, white streak of foam. In those ages when it was built it might well have been impregnable, and, even now, what was left inspired astonished admiration of its marvellous strength of position. As we went along I could not take my eyes from it; it was such

a perfect work of art in such a perfect setting, and while I looked I asked its history. It was 'Amorat Malik Shah,' built 'ten thousand years ago'—and now there was no access to it. Once there was a great causeway, but now it is *makrubat*—ruined—and none can enter. I would have given much to cross and explore the place—but, alas! it was not to be, and we pressed on, amid the most splendidly magnificent scenery, until the hills closed in and towered higher, and we entered a *canyon*, where, once, only the river flowed, while above sheer walls of rock towered to a thousand feet. Now a roadway has been built in the cliff-side—there are the remains of an older one opposite—and side by side with the roaring torrent, now tossed from boulder to gigantic boulder, now running swift and smooth and deep where the straight black rock dived into it, we passed in a midday gloom through the windings of this huge chasm.

In a little we passed Baijun, where, close by the tiny village, there was a hot spring, wherein some women were washing clothes. Our path lay still along the river, now this side of it, now that, and always under the great overshadowing mountains. At last a little white edifice appeared among some thin trees far down the gorge. 'Siawisha?' I asked; that being our destination, and I having been told an hour and a half ago that it was two *farsakhs* distant. No—this was Aliabad. Siawisha was two *farsakhs*! I mentally cursed all things Persian, and the *farsakh* in particular. Only an hour to dark, so this must be our '*munzil*,' and Siawisha still eight miles away.

Soon after three next morning my little expedition was awake, and about dawn we started again, down by the side of the river-bed in the gorge.

Yesterday's lost time had to be made up, and so we

hurried along, flinging stones at flagging mules, switching the pony from behind, which made him kick, bustling away still along by the running water—of which the name was, I found, Haras River—and still under those great mountains, now beginning to be dotted with trees, and growing more than ever like the Simla hills. There was sport about. A pigeon flew out* from the rocks; but it was for big game that the place looked best fitted. The wooded slopes should hide panther and bear, and, likely enough, ibex too.

It was three hours before we reached Siawisha,—I thanked Heaven we had not attempted it last night,—and as the *charvardar* insisted on a cup of tea, I pushed on alone with the mules, telling him to catch us up afterwards.

On the whole, my experience as head muleteer was not unsatisfactory, although possibly I did not quite observe the rules of the road. Somehow, when Meshed-i-Astulla was in command, we always seemed to have to wait while other people passed. By a very simple expedient, I contrived that now the other people should wait, or get out of the way somehow, while my little string of mules wandered by. This effect was produced by my going on in front, and whenever a caravan appeared, waving my stick in the face of the leading mule, which made him run into the wall or down into the river, followed by his companions; and so we got along at an admirable pace.

I have no doubt, however, I should not have been permanently popular on the road.

My *charvardar's* 'cup of tea' must have been a mere euphemism, for I felt myself quite an experienced mule-driver before he and his boy eventually overtook us. I remember producing some of my finest Persian objur-

gations, mingled with threats that their *inam*, or reward, was rapidly diminishing; but my thoughts were soon diverted by other matters, for it was at this point—but it is better told in the words I wrote that night.

‘The hills have been becoming more and more thickly wooded until even their summits are clad in a warm garb of firs rising from out the dull white snow, while at last has come, at a bend, a vista of great brown mountains, their lower slopes bare, but aloft clad in a forest of trees, and, far at the end of the valley, a peak, head to foot a mass of foliage. We have steadily come down and down, the wind has died away gradually, even our torrent has imperceptibly become a river—still the change, when it does come, is overwhelming.

‘Round a corner, and we have left Persia. Before turning it—the dry aridness we have seen and got used to the whole way from the Gulf, redeemed perhaps by those fir-clad summits, but still, Persia. Then,—there is a hazy look about the far hills instead of that unnatural sharpness of the East, a dim blueness softening everything beautifully. And, surely, the air is moist? Not wet—moist, a delicate gradation between wet and dry. Yes, it is so, and can it be? the breeze breathes an odour, an odour of earth and the trees; of the soft brown earth, the green trees. This faint fragrance that sends a curious thrill, as only a scent can, through the whole body,—why, that must be may! Yes, may!—down there, see, a dazzling white mass, and again, nearer, but less noticeable at first glance, a tree covered with pink blossoms. Can that be grass?—green grass? a field? A field with a brown path through it,—how strange,—that gives another thrill. So does a faint divine odour of violets,

and the sight of the little blue blossoms and their white sisters nestling in the bank of a tiny stream flowing amid moss through a glade of trees. So does the delicate green of the tree—the buds;—and all of a sudden the truth flashes—this is spring, an English spring, and as a bird breaks into song from a little thicket, the tears come into my eyes.

‘It is so long—three long years—since I was at home and saw it all. After that, the cruel magnificent East—and now in a moment it is all back again, and all so vividly sudden. I draw the breath of spring into my nostrils—glorious—glorious;—I go out of my way to tread on a piece of soft green turf—oh! the feel of it underfoot;—I stop to hear the song of the bird;—I could sing myself;—I am intoxicated by the joy of it all after these weary years. The half-dead, withered feelings come to life;—some shrivelled thing in my heart grows green, expands, blossoms;—oh, the world, the sweet, soft world,—it is very good.

‘And out to the world goes my soul;—I am too little for it—it overflows, enters all things, inspires all things. This man who comes—surely he is my friend, a good straight fellow, such as I have not seen the like of: “Peace be with thee”:—“And with thee peace”;—oh, my friend, the joy in my heart, I would you could feel it.

‘We stop at a little tea-house in a village,—was there ever such a tea-house or such a village!—and I catch a fluffy puppy from among some sacks, and simply make it eat biscuits. How could it not?—it must; and, as it does, I wonder is it really such a delightful puppy,—such a sweet woolly thing,—or is it all the spring?

‘To have missed a precious thing—and of a sudden to find it—can there be such joy? Down along the

valley, by the stream through woods—real woods—past mossy pools, till, there in the bank, a yellow eye looks a welcome at me,—a primrose. One,—a hundred, and among them the violets, deep purple, lightest blue, pure white, and that ravishing scent mingling always with the may.

‘It is the essence of all the springs, the perfection of all their beauties, a dream springland. . . .’

I was in a little islet of valley buried deep in the mountains, and, soon, the hills closed in to form another gorge. But now the steep rocks blossomed with trees, between which an emerald mantle of moss softly shone. Below, the shadow-flecked waters glided over pebbly shadows or slept in dim, mysterious pools.

The beauty all around took the whole attention—which was, perhaps, as well, for the road was so execrable that, were one to have thought of it, one would surely have grown worried and weary. Imagine a mass of boulders, generally the size of a football, dotted with others as large as cricket balls, and planted loosely in slush and mud;—that was the best part of the road. The worst was composed of accidental steps up and down, perhaps a foot high, and varied by holes about as deep, filled with mud. Along this plodded the wretched mules, struggling and labouring;—why they did not collapse altogether I could not make out.

For oneself, it was almost impossible to walk; the foot, however carefully planted, was nearly sure to slip on the invariably slime-coated stone, and to step, as the mules did, in the mud-filled hollows was simply not to be contemplated.

At last we reached a place where the gorge finally widened;—this was the end of the mountains. In

front, low, jungle-clad hills still closed the mouth of the valley, but it was plain we had finished with climbing.

The river-bed grew broader, its waters took three channels amid the pebbly waste, and we entered on great damp expanses under trees, with now and then a stream of water intersecting. The sun was covered by clouds; there was a jungle all around, gloomy and mysterious; and over all hung a moist, marshy pall.

A moment's halt for a cup of tea at a little house in a green patch, and we pressed on, refreshed, until, through a clump of trees, I saw a great dim stretch of dusky wooded land, extending away to where, on the horizon, an almost imperceptible grey line, with a curiously regular contour, made my heart suddenly leap. Yes, it was the sea.

I remember thinking that with some such feelings Xenophon's army must have come over the hill-crest two thousand years ago, and raised the shout, *Θάλασσα! θάλασσα!*—'The sea! the sea!'

Just three months ago I had looked my last on the glittering waters of the Persian Gulf, and it was with a strange sensation that I stared at the dim grey line across which lay my way—home.

Fording the three channels of the river, we came out on a marshy, reed-grown track, thick with bracken. Here and there was a clump of trees already in bud. Sometimes there came a great tree of may, and everywhere lay low, mossy banks, a mass of violets and primroses.

Just as dark was closing in we came, after over twelve hours of marching, to our destination, the little village of Katabusht; a group of thatched cottages set down in the midst of a country, which, but for that

bank of forest-clad, snow-crowned peaks behind, might well have been England itself.

In such places one comes across curious companions. Next door to me, in a bare mud room, I heard groans, and going in, found a man sick with rheumatic fever. I could only give him some quinine and return to my own hovel, where, however, I was not to be alone for the night, for just as I sat down to write my diary, a rustle in the corner made me start, and looking into the shadows, I saw an old hen placidly sitting on a nest of eggs.

Next morning we left the village, which looked in the first rays of sunlight a pretty picture of moss and may and thatched cottages among the trees. The way lay first over swampy ground—great bushy reeds and marshy wastes ; but in a little we were passing along what was almost an English lane. Banks on each side were decked with primroses, violets, and anemones ; the warm, moist air was filled with scent, and, actually, round about there were hedged fields.

After twenty miles came Barferush, and just after crossing a river by a magnificent bridge of many arches, there opened out before our eyes a delightful picture. In the centre of a lake, reed-clad and peopled with wild-fowl, who seemed to know no fear, was a green island, thick with orange-trees, covered with fruit, and poplars ; while between the foliage was seen what appeared to be a white-walled, red-tiled mansion, like an English country seat. Across the lake to this lovely island led a long, low bridge, whose pointed stone arches were mirrored in the still waters below. The whole had an old-time picturesqueness—and one might have imagined one had strayed into a dream of some backwater of the Thames, endowed, in true dream fashion, with the atmosphere of the East.

Passing over the little arched causeway, I paid a visit to this place, one of the Shah's palaces, while my muleteer foraged after his lunch. Since it was the Shah's, it was, of course, ruined. The red-tiled roof was dilapidated, the many-paned windows were half destroyed, the courtyard in the centre had long been overgrown with trees. It was all a striking picture of the desolation of the work of man and the triumph of Nature's beauty. The garden, with its wealth of fruit-laden orange-trees, its dark glory of stately poplars, all set on a green carpet of turf and in a glittering frame of reed-fringed waters, lay basking in the sunlight. A soft breeze just rippled the lake, and the warm delight of a summer-like spring breathed everywhere. I spent a quarter of an hour wandering through the ruins looking idly at the traces that those who had long ago lived there had left behind them, and at the inscriptions left on the walls by many more recent visitors. None were English, only one French; 'le Docteur de Barfarouche.'

Returning from this delightful garden, half-way across the bridge I met some strange men, who, to my surprise, addressed me in Hindustani. They were, I found, from Kelat, and were 'pilgriming.' One of them had been once in the 6th Punjab Infantry (he saluted me at first, and I guessed he had served somewhere), so the mystery was solved. With a parting 'God-speed' and another salute, they passed on, and the paths of our lives which chance had brought together, again separated for ever.

The men of Barferush had, I should think, not often seen a European, certainly they had never seen a dog like Stumps, and he attracted first attention, then insult, and at last was in danger of being attacked. It happened in the bazaar, and after the poor little

fellow had been hunted, until I came to his rescue, by some loutish ruffians, the interest of affairs was enlivened by the advent of a cow, which at once went for Stumps, until I rode her off, to the best of my ability. The crowd now began to show signs of unpleasant intentions. Some threw stones; but I made a friend hand up the little dog to me as I sat on my pony, and eventually I passed on peacefully.

To-night's resting-place was Meshed-i-Astulla's home, for he lived just beyond Barferush. As we came up, a little boy scrambled over a hedge and ran after us. '*Chiz-i-mun*'—'My thing, this'—said old Meshed-i-Astulla, catching him in his arms and slinging him over his shoulder; and so we entered his house.

The place was like an English farmhouse, and I was honoured by the chief room therein. It was evidently, on ordinary occasions, the *anderoon*, or women's apartment, and in the centre of the floor was the grating on which would stand the little charcoal stove used to warm the air under the rugs, beneath which the feminine members of the household tuck their legs so snugly. On one side, it had no wall, but a white sheet, which could be let down at night and furled in the daytime. At the moment it kept out the light, but not the air, which, though a very desirable condition of affairs in summer, was trying on the afternoon of a chilly winter's day.

Asking my permission first, Meshed-i-Astulla stopped behind at his home, when I set off on my last march to the Caspian. I had got to like the old chap immensely. He was a dear, fatherly old man, hard-working and kindly and honest, to boot. Also he was as nearly energetic as it is possible for a Persian to be, and it was with a real touch of regret that I said

good-bye, he grasping my hand and shaking it up and down for nearly a minute, while he uttered words of goodwill for my journey. He left his little son to go with us, an imp of perhaps six, who, half as high as the leading mule, strode manfully along in front of it, the rope in his hands, his father's lash wound round his waist, adjuring the beast now and then with a would-be *charvardar's* cry—that strange vicious ‘er-r-r’ ending shortly and abruptly, generally with a cut at some unfortunate animal's legs. His air of superb importance as he swung his little arms from side to side and stalked along made all the muleteers coming the other way (their mules to-day laden with blue-papered sugar-cones) look at us with an amused smile, until, after a couple of miles, the little chap told me, ‘I am tired,’ and I had him put on the top of a load.

Our way lay along the river, now running sluggishly between steep banks. In the midst of their little gardens of blossoming may and fruit-laden orange-trees, thatched cottages were sprinkled plentifully about the wooded country. In the gardens were also tiny edifices resembling summer-houses, which, with their bare floors raised on piles, and their picturesque tiled roofs, much puzzled me, until I learnt that in these the silkworms were set to spin their cocoons, after being warmed from torpor to life next the body of some swarthy damsel.

Round a corner suddenly came into view an irregular line of quite European buildings, a widening estuary, and beyond, the sea.

Across Persia,—from sea to sea ; it was accomplished.

One of the houses, which possessed a sign-board in Russian, looked like an hotel. Going up to it, I asked the apparent proprietor if he spoke English, French,

or German. No, only Russian and Persian. So in the latter tongue I inquired if I could get a room for the night. Saying 'I can do so,' he conducted me upstairs. But my quarters were not to be here, for as, a little afterwards, I made some inquiries in the custom house about the steamer, up there bustled the hospitable French superintendent of customs, a delightful little man, whose heart was obviously in Paris, though his body might be in Meshed-i-Ser. He insisted on my transferring to his house from my quarters at what turned out to be, not, after all, an hotel, but an 'agency.'

His home was snug and admirably furnished. The room in which I was introduced to 'Madame' contained some exquisite antiquities, which my heart defied all commandments in coveting. There were two tables, the surfaces of which consisted of china pictures, one of which showed Fath Ali Shah and his councillors drinking sherbet; the other, a wedding, the young man on a horse surrounded by his friends, being conducted towards the young lady, veiled, also on a horse, and also accompanied by a crowd of intimates.

There were, I heard, only four such in Persia, and they particularly attracted me—they were, I may add, about 4 feet long and 2 wide. Near by was a tile of *reflet metallique*, which had been pronounced by a friend of my host's to be worth 1,000 francs. There were other tiles, mostly very old and in relief, depicting various scenes, such as the shoeing of a horse, two courtiers with hawks on their arms, etc., which pleased me still more. Two complete sets of chain mail adorned one wall, and some ancient fire-arms and swords surrounded them. In my room was a really beautiful and apparently very old picture, unmounted, the shape of an arch, about four feet high

and two broad, representing two figures holding each other's hands ; very finely executed.

After long and arduous journeying, it takes several meals to, as it were, bring up the average, and I fear my appetite for lunch astonished my excellent hosts. One of the dishes was some local caviar, the best I had ever tasted. These coasts are one of the chief sources of supply for this Russian delicacy.

Afterwards came a little conversation, of which a last extract from my diary shall speak :

‘My host does not love this land ;—fever, rheumatism, ague, no society, no comforts, and as for the country : “ They are a set of dolts—they do nothing, they know nothing. They could do anything with this land—it produces two crops a year ; but they are too unenterprising to even plough it ; they do nothing but grow some rice. There is nothing to be got here but eggs, chickens, and rice—no meat, no anything.”

‘ Having seen so much sugar coming in from Russia, I ask if it could not be grown here. “ It grows wild,” is the answer, “ but they are such dolts. As to the road,—the Government will do nothing. If it is wet, it takes two days to cover the fifteen miles from Meshed-i-Ser to Barferush”—and I have had some experience of what it is like beyond.

‘ Altogether an unlucky land, a land of possibilities, negatived by the apathy and ill-health of its inhabitants.’

My journeyings were at an end ; the long marches were over. No more was there the thought every day of a new home at night. No longer was there the care of obtaining food and the primitive methods of eating it. I was back in a world of white tablecloths and sparkling silver ; of china and glass, and sheets and chairs and tables. It was curious and it

was delightful. It is a pity that novel sensations wear off so soon. Could they only be preserved, they would make life a very different business. To-day I revelled, but I knew that in a week or so I should have sunk again into the same old state of things that I had long ago left ;—everything done for me instead of having to do everything for myself. The luxury of not having to get food, make beds, pack, and walk thirty miles every day, would not be appreciated—indeed, that other life would by then seem an enviable dream ; so discontented and unpleasable a thing is man. Yet I knew, and still know, that a past thickly peopled with pleasant and interesting recollections is no small joy in life. In a way, indeed, the present is but the preparation process of the past. The present is everything, and yet it is nothing. The past is always something. Remembrance is the only abiding thing in existence ; it is, indeed, the essential part of any connected existence. Although my travels were over, they would surely remain a definite and solid asset until the day of my death. ‘To travel hopefully,’ as says Stevenson, ‘is better than to arrive’ ; but the best of all is to be able to look back on that hopeful travelling.

The closing scene will always live vividly in my memory.

I leave Persia in a country barge which is to take me to the two-funnelled paddle-boat lying half a mile out. Kishna comes with me to say good-bye, and to say good-bye also to little Stumps, whom I think he loves a great deal better than he does myself !

The wharf is crowded. My host is surrounded by a collection of various disreputable persons as I say good-bye, and I step from Persia, as I stepped into it, with a surrounding air of bustle and hurry, ~~which~~ completely belies the true tone of the country.

The sail rises ; the rowers lay down their paddles ; the creek, the little houses, grow smaller and yet smaller behind us ;—there is a ripple of water at the bows ; and at my heart, in spite of all, a feeling of sorrow at leaving the land where I have spent those months that even now, with only a strip of shining water between me and Persia, seem a curious shadowy dream. I am going back to civilization. I am leaving the East. I am flying forward on the wings of time. For I have spent a little while in another age,—a sleepy, old-world age, in a forgotten corner, where the great eye of time has forgotten to look, and the dust has collected. The dust must be swept away ; it will be swept away ; but yet it seems somehow a pity. There comes a not-to-be-denied, unreasoning regret for the gently moving, placid life, the idle, wasteful hours spent in the sun and the soft wind : for the unthinking days lazed away far from the bustle of the world, with only the strange old thoughts to brood over ;—a life of peaceful pondering, of drifting on until death come and solve all things ;—the same death in the great city, on the lone plain—the same death, so what does it matter in the end ? And yet——

A grating bump ;—the black sides of the steamer, overhanging, bring me to myself and to a new world.

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